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Gwen
Or
The Cousins

By A. M. Goodrich
Author of '*Claudia*'



VOL I

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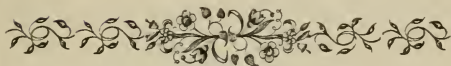
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TO

M—— B——.

My fancy in thy pleasant home is free,
My heart rejoices while it dwells with thee;
Swiftly beneath thine eye these pages grew,
Mid scenes where loveliness is ever new.
In after days, if such for me remain,
Thy image still shall every leaf retain,
Most prized for the fond spell that calls thee near,
And bids thy accents linger on my ear.



Gen. B. Bay 25 Aug 53 Albany 20

Look here upon this picture, and on this.—HAMLET.

Pentendo e perdonando.—DANTE.

Emily Fortnum
with A. P. Jones and
her wishes 1889 —



PART I.

If he chance to die young, yet he lives long that lives well.
Besides God is better than His promise. He takes from him a
long lease, and gives him a freehold of better value.

FULLER.—*Holy State—The Good Child.*





CHAPTER I.

O deare, sweete, and desireable child !

Evelyn's Diary.

'ARE you at home, Mrs. Irving ?'
'Oh ! yes, ma'am ; pray come in.'

'I shall spoil your dinner, I am afraid, by the care I have taken to come just at the hour when your scholars are gone to theirs,' said Mrs. Norton, laughing, as she glanced round the neat little schoolroom. There was a very tidy, sensible-looking young woman standing at a cheerful fire, preparing the coming meal for herself and the elderly, quiet, cleanly mistress of the school, Mrs. Irving, her mother.

'Our dinner is not ready ; the children won't be back for an hour, and my husband is not come in. Pray sit down.'

'I have scarcely leisure to do that,' replied Mrs. Norton, who rarely had time to get through half the business which she proposed to execute ; but still she took the proffered chair, and, looking at Mrs. Irving's daughter, said, 'Don't be angry with me, Mrs. Irving, though I come to entice Catherine away from you, if I can.'

'Well, ma'am, if you want anything, I don't know how I am to say nay.'

'When you hear why I want your daughter, I think you will be as inclined to set her to the work I have to propose as I am myself. Still you must consider a little whether you can spare her just now. You must know I have a house full of friends ; Mrs. Faulkner—a very fashionable lady indeed, Mrs Irving,' said Mrs.

Norton, with something between a smile and a sigh ; 'a sort of connexion of Colonel Norton's ; and her two daughters, the Eustaces, children of her former husband ; and all their maids and nurses. Now the eldest, Mary, poor thing, I see, is going into a consumption as fast as possible ; they talk of her spine, too, and will scarcely let her rise from her sofa. It half breaks my heart to see the child.' The tears came into Mrs. Norton's pretty blue eyes, but she twinkled them away, and went on, only talking a little faster than before, 'She is not eleven ; and the other, Geraldine, about eight years old, the handsomest creature you ever saw—a splendid child !—full of spirit and life—too boisterous and too self-willed to be a companion to a little invalid. Mrs. Faulkner doats on them both, I don't doubt ; but still it seems to me that poor Mary is not understood as I should wish. There she lies, so silently, all by herself, never wanting to keep any one near her, and scarcely equal to their breaking in on her when they return from their walk or their drive, full of something which they think will amuse her. She is too ill to be amused in that way, and I have been thinking what can be done for her. They are going to move into a house of their own, and to stay at Brighton to see if the air will strengthen her—not much chance of that, I am afraid ; but meanwhile, I do think it might be a very great comfort to her if she could have such a person as Catherine about her. It is of no use to try to explain what I mean to Mrs. Faulkner, or her fine lady's-maid ; but Catherine—ah ! that is just the thing ; and you have told me that you have thought at times of her going out as a sort of nursery governess for a while ; and this poor child is passionately fond of reading, but her weakness often falls on her eyes, and then she can do little in that way ; and to see her fold her pale hands on her breast as she lies on her couch—there is in her attitude the most touching resignation to her enforced inactivity, that you can imagine. I can't understand what makes

her so different from all around her—so very much more serious—so earnestly religious—’

‘Suffering, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Irving, wiping her eyes.

‘I suppose so,’ replied Mrs. Norton, in a tone of reverence ; then, after a short pause, she turned to Catherine, saying, ‘Catherine is really one of the nicest readers I ever heard. I don’t mean such praise as I should bestow on your first class when they get through the lesson without a mistake. Her reading is quite superior to anything of that sort. Then her ways with children are so good, and she is a capital nurse, that I know. All I want is for her to come up to me, and to take on herself all the attendance that Miss Mary requires. For the future we shall see what course things will take.’

‘Well, ma’am, as you say, I have always been prepared to part with Catherine, and this is the softest beginning, the least like being divided that we can have ; so, if you please, she shall come to you when you like.’

‘This evening, Catherine,—do you think you can come ? you can sleep at home for this week—at least, if you prefer it.’

And Mrs. Norton took leave of them.

‘Mother,’ said Catherine,—returning after she had taken their visitor down stairs, ‘if Miss Mary is like what Mrs. Norton says, I sha’n’t know how to do enough for her.’

‘She is a very kind-hearted lady,’ replied Mrs. Irving ; ‘any one who suffers touches her.’

Catherine set to work to arrange everything for her mother’s comfort before leaving her.

‘Good bye, mother dear,’ she said ; ‘I shall be back again at night.’ And in her usual neat and peculiarly plain attire she set out to Mrs. Norton’s well-known door.

‘Catherine Irving is here, ma’am,’ said the servant to Mrs. Norton, who was watering some flowers in her

verandah. A child of eight years old was standing by Mrs. Norton, watching her with interest, and crying :

‘Oh ! what a beauty ! oh ! that camellia ! I must have it for mamma ; do give it me, let me pick it.’

But Mrs. Norton warded off the attack on her lovely flower : ‘No, my dear, not this one, it is for poor Mary’s balcony, you know. It will last a long while for her to look at. Your mamma would much rather that it should give Mary pleasure for several days than wear it herself this one evening, I am sure.’

‘No, no, mamma must have it. I want to see it in her beautiful hair. She will wear it if I tell her, and Mary won’t care ; I am sure she won’t, she never does care about anything.’

‘But I do,’ replied Mrs. Norton gravely, and putting down the child’s arm ; ‘I care, and I do not mean you to have that blossom, Geraldine. Now, come, you shall help me carry these flower-pots into Mary’s room, presently, for first we must call Catherine Irving, and take her with us. I want her to stay by your sister this evening while we are seeing the fireworks. Come, where is your mamma ?’

She held out her hand to take Geraldine’s ; the child drew back, scarlet with passion. Mrs. Norton was astonished. Geraldine darted through the window ; Mrs. Norton following more slowly, perceived her on her knees beside Mrs. Faulkner, hiding her face in her mother’s lap, and sobbing violently.

‘Oh ! mamma, my own dear mamma, I wanted it only for you, it was so beautiful ; I wanted to give it to you, and she was so cross, so ill-natured.’

Mrs. Norton could not refrain from laughing, as with difficulty she and Mrs. Faulkner collected these words, interrupted by sobs, from Geraldine’s lips. She patted the child’s luxuriant golden curls, and said :

‘Now, my dear Diane, do put this troublesome child by for a little, and come with me to see the young person whom I spoke to you about for Mary. She is here, and I want you to speak with her. This little

mischievous imp wished to break off my beautiful camellia that I have nursed up for Mary, just to stick in your hair. That would never do.'

Geraldine pushed away the hand that caressed her, because she thought the tongue wanting in due respect.

'My child, my dearest child,' said Mrs. Faulkner, hanging over her, her dark silken ringlets falling on Geraldine's snowy shoulders, which rose and fell with the sobs that had not yet subsided. 'You wanted that flower for me; I know, I see it all. But I would much rather Mary had it, dearest; we will both give it to her—there, it shall be yours, and you give it to me, and we both give it to Mary.'

She folded Geraldine in her arms as she spoke, and the child, raising her weeping face, kissed her mother passionately in return for her honied words, but bestowed no notice on Mrs. Norton.

'Rather cool to dispose of my flower thus,' thought Mrs. Norton. 'A very pretty sentimental termination to the drama, but not much poetic justice in it, that I can see.'

Geraldine, thus conciliated, and holding fast her mother's hand, condescended to follow her and Mrs. Norton to the room where Mary lay. Mrs. Norton called to Catherine to join them, and Mrs. Faulkner bestowed on her the sweetest smile of welcome possible. Entering Mary's room, Mrs. Faulkner went up to the sofa where she lay, and leaning over it, said:

'See, my dear Mary, we have brought you such a nice kind nurse to be with you, when we are obliged to be away. Lucy Norton knows her well, and says that you will delight in her; she can read to you, my child, beautifully, and spare your poor eyes, and she shall have nothing else to do but to attend to you. No one shall take up her time, or call her from you. I like her look so much—here, Catherine, come nearer. This is my dear, sick child; you will find her very patient, very good. She gives no one any trouble that she can help.'

Two or three tears fell from Mrs. Faulkner's beautiful hazel eyes on Mary's brow.

Geraldine meanwhile stood, pouting her coral lips, her round cheek stained with her recent tears, and the long dark lashes of her full blue eye still wet and heavy with them. She had fixed a long earnest stare on Catherine, half that of a mere child's wonder, half that of an impertinent spoilt child. There was something in the announcement that the new comer was to be wholly appropriated by Mary, that she should have no share in her attentions, no power to issue her commands, which gave her offence; and as her mother ceased speaking, she cried, in an unrestrained tone:

'How plain and common-looking she is! I would not have a maid like that.'

Nothing could be greater nonsense than to call Catherine Irving plain and common-looking. Shocked at Geraldine's rudeness, Mrs. Faulkner glanced at Catherine to see how she would bear it, and at once perceived how unfounded the assertion was. For the first time she really bestowed any observation on her; all the praise she had yet lavished had been without any attention to accuracy; she was merely thinking what would make her and Mary best pleased with each other. Now her eye rested on Catherine, standing there in her simple, almost quaker-coloured dress, her smooth, glossy braids of dark brown hair, her clear, creamy complexion, with a colour perhaps a little too marked for beauty on her fresh, healthy cheek,—her intelligent, bird-like eye, and mouth not less firm than good-humoured. She felt sure that she should like her, especially as at that moment, greatly to her relief, Catherine smiled. Geraldine's passionate, unmeaning remark might pass as a joke, she saw; but Mrs. Norton gave a turn to the joke not very pleasing to the proud little creature:

'Well, my dear,' she cried, 'as Catherine is never to do the least thing for you, it does not matter much that she does not please you.'

There was a merry laugh at these words, but it did not go round. Mrs. Faulkner felt that it was too much at her darling's expense to like to join in it; and Geraldine could not even smile. As a thunder-cloud on the blue æther, so looked her wrathful temper on her beautiful childhood.

Poor Geraldine !





CHAPTER II.

Soft as the scent of flowers—
Sweet as the song of birds among the bowers.

Moir's Poems.

‘WELL, Catherine, do you think that poor child is as ill as Mrs. Norton says?’ asked Mrs. Irving of her daughter, on her return.

‘Yes, mother, I do indeed; she is very thin and pale. It makes one’s heart ache to see her.’ And she began to busy herself with more than common energy in her preparations for supper.

‘Mother,’ she added, after a few minutes, ‘I shall love that child.’

‘I don’t doubt that you will, dear,’ replied Mrs. Irving.

‘That I shall,’ said Catherine; and she did not speak again till, after her father’s return, they were all seated comfortably at their evening meal.

‘You will like to know more of what I have been doing at Mrs. Norton’s, mother,’ she said. ‘I wish you had been up with me, and just seen Miss Geraldine—such a magnificent child; and her mamma—I do want you to see Mrs. Faulkner—but you will soon. I never saw any one so beautiful; and then her manner—you know what a kind, frank way Mrs. Norton has; well, it is not a bit like that.’

‘Do you mean that Mrs. Faulkner is neither frank nor kind?’ asked her father, laughing.

‘Oh! father, she is so gracious. She spoke as if she were asking a great favour of me when she put her child under my care, and I felt as if it were the greatest obligation any one ever conferred on me.’

Every one seems to love her, and well they may. Her poor sick child followed her with her eyes every time she moved. Mrs. Norton is as fond of her as if she were her sister, and Miss Geraldine clung around her, and seemed jealous of every word. They none of them stayed long; they were going to the fireworks. Miss Geraldine is not at all like her mother, though she is so handsome. I don't think you would know her to be her daughter from any resemblance between them. When I was alone with Miss Mary, though she is so pale and faded, poor thing, there was a look now and then in her that made me think more of Mrs. Faulkner than Miss Geraldine ever would. Mrs. Faulkner is very tall, mother, and slight and elegant. She does not look strong herself; her skin is so white and transparent, and just a pink colour that comes and goes;—and such beautiful hair she has, dark brown, and all crisp and waving. She let it down on her shoulders before she went to dress, and it unrolled itself almost to her knees. Just here and there a bright silver thread ran through it; she laughed, as one of them caught her eye. 'There, Lucy,' she said; 'see my grey hairs shining. I ought to be wiser than I am.'

'Why, how old should you take her to be, Catherine?'

'Oh, five and thirty, perhaps—not so much scarcely. Then she has the loveliest little white hand, which she passed through her hair, throwing it back, and looking at us with her soft, hazel eyes;—soft, yet merry too, and arch. It was very pretty and pleasant while they were there, mother; but I think more now of the poor, pale child, with just that one bright spot on her cheek,—perhaps it only comes in the evening,—and eyes that glitter till I felt almost frightened at them; their light was so unnatural.'

Mrs. Norton that evening had the little episode of the camellia to relate to her husband.

'This woman is intolerable,' was Colonel Norton's brief reply.

‘How can you say so of the most fascinating creature that ever was seen?’ exclaimed his wife; ‘and really, Charlie, there are times when you seem to find it easy enough to endure her.’

‘Thank Heaven, my dear, that she is not my wife, to make a fool of me always, instead of sometimes.’

‘Oh! then you feel that she is dangerous?’

‘Why, she imposes on you—’

‘No, no, there is no imposition, no trick, I assure you. She is quite real. All the good you see is quite as genuine as—’

‘The folly,’ suggested Colonel Norton. Neither of them required a sterner word.

‘Well,’ continued Lucy, ‘you will allow that you like her better than that very wise woman, Lady Rivers, Mr. Faulkner’s sister?’

‘Certainly, I will acknowledge that, if it be the least satisfaction to you to hear me say so. I never disliked any other woman as I dislike Lady Rivers. She is insupportably impertinent. She would walk into your house and regulate everything in it, from the ordering of the dinner of that day to the education of your boys, and the management of your estate. She shrinks from no responsibility, as she would say, with unflinching fortitude. She has too much strength of mind and strength of will for me.’

‘Poor Mrs. Faulkner trembles like a leaf before her.’

‘But she contrives to evade and to conquer too, though she never employs open resistance. ‘When the cat’s away the mouse will play;’ and Lady Rivers not by, ‘poor Mrs. Faulkner’ manages to do very much as she pleases, my dear Lucy.’

‘Well, really, you know, if Diane could find out how to manage her own children, she would be the proper person to do it. It is very absurd for Lady Rivers to interfere on every occasion with the Eustaces; it is not as if they were her own nieces, even.’

‘No, it is not; and she meddles to such bad purpose that I wish she would not do so at all. Diane and her husband would be better without her. Faulkner is a good fellow, though I can’t altogether get on with him; and I am sorry for him when I see them worry him.’

‘He is unboundedly generous to Diane and her children,’ said Mrs. Norton. ‘There is not the slightest restriction placed on her as to the sums she lavishes on their education, dress, or anything—and as to medical advice for poor Mary, no parent could desire more earnestly to afford her everything that holds out the faintest promise of relief. Diane told me so to-day with tears in her eyes.’

‘No bad exchange for a young life-guardsmen as extravagant and as foolish as herself, this wealthy merchant, on my word.’

‘Oh! don’t say that. Poor Harry Eustace! What a kindhearted, goodnatured fellow he was—and what a handsome couple they were that first season in town after their marriage, and how shockingly they ran in debt.’

‘Yes. I think that those three years of risk and poverty went far to cure Diane of all the real romance of her nature, though she clings to a semblance of it still. You will see, Lucy, when her daughters are grown up, what lessons she will read them about handsome guardsmen and younger sons. She will not let her beauty, Miss Geraldine, imitate the example of her own youth. A little haughty creature! I believe that if you asked her now she would tell you that she would trample any coronet but a duke’s under her feet. That is what she will learn by heart, and very probably it is Faulkner’s weak point also.’

‘Perhaps so; and I have no doubt that he will bestow magnificent portions on these girls—not that Mary will live to enjoy one. The child has just her father’s look—his dying look, I mean. Poor Diane!’

‘You are too fond of saying ‘poor Diane,’ my dear,’ cried Colonel Norton, avoiding the painful subject of Mary’s malady. ‘Depend upon it, ‘poor Diane’ pities you full as much as you can pity her, for your half-pay, disabled husband, your homely children in straw bonnets and cotton frocks, and only one house to live in, and that not a large one.’

‘Nonsense, Charles!’ cried Mrs. Norton, indignantly. ‘Do you suppose that dry, silent man of money, who never knows how to please her but by making her a present, can be to her the least what you are to me? or that she would not gladly exchange poor Mary’s sickly looks for my girls’ roses? And as to that little proud termagant, Geraldine, I would not have a child with such a temper as hers for all the beauty in the world.’

‘Stuff! I would make her a well-behaved little girl in a fortnight.’

‘It is very easy for you to fancy that; you don’t know the trouble that I have with her. Our children are not used to the sort of thing. As to the boys, when they come in from school, it is terrible; and they have not found out any simple method of reducing her to obedience.’

‘Obedience!’ repeated Colonel Norton, laughing. ‘She is quite right to make Freddy and Johnnie her slaves; it is but breaking them in early. I have nothing to say against that; but, seriously, I won’t have my little women plagued, and I am not sorry that Diane saw a house to-day pretty enough to suit her fancy.’





CHAPTER III.

Her ways were ways of innocence and joy,
But pain is all her dower, and stern disease.

Yet to Heaven

At each calm interval to anguish given,
She lifted her full eye and thankful smile.
Meek soul, to sorrow reconciled, awhile
And each dark hour with thorns of sorrow sown,
Shall add a gem to thine eternal crown.

Thoughts in Past Years.

WHEN Mrs. Faulkner removed to her own house, she engaged Catherine Irving's services immediately during her stay at Brighton. Catherine cordially acceded to wishes cordially expressed, saying to her mother: 'There is something about that sick child that I shall never forget as long as I live, even if I see her no more after she goes from here.'

'Does she get very fond of you?' asked Mrs. Irving.

'Well, I think she does, but she is so gentle and kind in all her ways that it is not very easy to discover whom she likes best to have about her, or when she is tired. She keeps up to the last, if others seem to desire it, and tries to enjoy whatever is done to please her, however little it may be really to her taste.'

'How nice of her! However, she makes more happiness for herself that way than she ever could by indulging fancies and fretfulness.'

'I hope she does; and I really believe that she is happier on the whole than Miss Geraldine, who is carrying on one perpetual struggle for her own way. I am particularly careful, mother, not to let her have it with me, and yet I don't think that the child, wilful as she is, dislikes me.'

‘Oh! no, she won’t dislike you for that, Catherine; never fear. You have a good temper, and are used to children.’

‘It would never do to be ill tempered with her. Mrs. Faulkner would not allow it for a moment. Firmness is the only thing, and indeed, mother, I don’t think that could be carried out, if it were not for Miss Mary. You see they were getting afraid that Miss Geraldine was too much for her, and was doing her harm, and so she was; now I have to see to that, and what I say must not be, must not be; and I do hope that dear patient child will have a more comfortable life now than before.’

‘Why, do you mean to say that her mother could bear to see her disturbed?’

‘I think that she could neither bear it nor prevent it, and that in fact she wants me chiefly for the sake of having some one near who does not mind saying ‘No.’ She had no difficulty in getting Miss Mary to put up with Miss Geraldine’s whims without complaint, but lately she has been forced to open her eyes to the harm that was going on, and feels herself constrained to put a check on it.’

What Catherine said was very true. Mrs. Faulkner had suspected how much she wanted the assistance of a strong mind and a firm temper in the management of her two children, before Mrs. Norton delicately suggested the want to her; and when Catherine Irving had been with her a very short time, she began to feel, and to show that she felt, that she was an acquisition that she should ill know how to dispense with. It was fortunate that Mrs. Norton’s selection had been so good a one. Very few women of Catherine’s age and station would have borne the ordeal so well as she did. There were trials of temper and of patience in plenty, and other trials more dangerous still. Mrs. Faulkner discovered that Catherine had no equal; that no one possessed so much common sense, so much presence of mind, fortitude, patience, or sweetness of temper; that

no one was so ready to oblige, no one dreaded fatigue or inconvenience so little, no one had such a memory, no one's word could be so unhesitatingly believed. Nothing could be well done till Catherine had been consulted, and it was better not to undertake anything that had not received her approbation.

Catherine's head was not turned. She was even calm enough to perceive that, with all this praise of words, there was nevertheless a little reserve in action all the while. Mrs. Faulkner still preserved a will of her own, and could not altogether exchange the accustomed flatteries of Mrs. Collinson, her maid, for the novelty of Catherine's truth. She kept the former about herself, but she was perfectly sincere in saying, that she rejoiced to have the latter about Mary, especially as she had not been long in Brighton before she became, as was her wont, the centre of a circle in which she received adulation enough to have turned a wiser brain, or to have corrupted a nature less truly kind and generous. Be it that the heart did retain soundness at the core, it was enough to amaze Catherine to perceive that under the influence of she knew not what infatuation, something was at work within strong enough to drag the mother from her child's sick bed, where perhaps she had just been shedding paroxysms of tears, followed, as she must have felt herself to be, to the door by Mary's fond, dying eyes, while not one word of entreaty escaped her patient, self-denying lips, to scenes whence she returned often apparently wearied and disgusted,—wearied with what was meant to amuse, disgusted with others and with herself. Whatever the allurements were—whether idleness, dislike to devise her own amusement, or to fill up her hours with employments that exacted some exertion of her own mind, or thirst of flattery, or love of dress, or all combined,—it lost not its power; and forth from her home went Mrs. Faulkner, by day and by night, sometimes perhaps not fully aware of her child's state, but sometimes certainly when she would have

been ashamed for Mr. Faulkner to have known, as well as she knew herself, how ill Mary was when she left her.

But Mr. Faulkner seldom visited Brighton, and when he came he exercised no restraining power. He trusted Diane implicitly as a wife and a mother; for, beautiful as she was, and loving admiration, she was so perfectly free from coquetry that she had never stirred within him the jealousy which he was by no means incapable of feeling, and he could not have a misgiving as to her care of the children whom she appeared to idolize. As Mrs. Norton had observed, he seldom came unprovided with a gift; some sparkling jewel, some costly dress of a new manufacture, some ornament for tables which already groaned under them; and Diane accepted all with a grace which seemed to impart something of its own quality to the donor. His austere countenance appeared to reflect the sweetness of her smile, and his hard hand to relax at the touch of hers—the softest, whitest, most beautifully-formed ever seen.

It would have been a difficult task to bring home to Mrs. Faulkner the charge of neglecting or forsaking her ailing child. Never did she quit the house without first repairing to her side; every evening, in her gay attire, her beautifully-shaped head encircled with jewels which glittered on her dark hair, she would linger in Mary's room to the last moment; yes, and after her carriage had driven to the door, and her servant had more than once let her know that it was waiting. Wait it always did, but it never was discharged.

One evening Mary's cheek was more burning than ever, and her eyes brighter. As Mrs. Faulkner sat beside her, her jewelled arm lying across the bed, and the girl's thin fingers playing with a pearl bracelet, letting pearl by pearl pass through them, Catherine was more struck than she had ever been before by the likeness between the mother and daughter. Mary seemed restless and feverish, and absent too; she did not let go

her mother's arm when the carriage was announced. She looked up as if she wished to speak, and her mother paused, as if unwilling to go till she had spoken, yet afraid to ask what she would say. At last she said, with a deep sigh :

‘Mary, my child, I must leave you now. I promised Lady D—— not to be late.’

She stooped down to kiss her ; Mary threw her arms round her neck in a sort of ungovernable transport very unusual with her.

‘Mamma, dearest mamma, good night, good night !’ And she kissed her again and again, as if she could scarcely detach her lips from her cheek. It was a strange and painful sight to see that splendidly dressed woman, with a face of unspeakable anguish, bending over the emaciated, fevered child, in her white night-dress, disengaging herself with difficulty from the long thin arms that clung round her.

When Mrs. Faulkner reached the door she stopped, and said to Catherine, with a voice choked with tears :

‘Catherine, you won’t leave her on any account till I return ?’

‘No, ma’am ; certainly not.’

‘Oh ! my child, why must I quit you ?’

‘Why, indeed !’ thought Catherine.

Mary had thrown herself on her face on the pillow. Mrs. Faulkner took a step towards her. Catherine could not refrain ; she placed herself between them, and cried, earnestly :

‘Oh ! ma’am, if you are going, go now.’

Mrs. Faulkner turned and quitted the room.

Then Catherine went and sat down near Mary’s bed, and took a piece of needlework in her hand that Mary might not think that she was watching for her to raise her face ; even when she knew that the girl was looking up with eyes fixed on her, she took no notice.

‘Catherine !’ said Mary, tremulously.

Catherine threw her work away, came to the bed-

side, and knelt down, leaning her arm on it, waiting to hear what would follow.

Tears stood in the child's eyes.

'Catherine,' she said, 'mamma is very beautiful. How beautiful she looked to-night!—It was right for her to go; she had promised that she would, you know.'

She spoke with a determination unlike herself, and Catherine did not gainsay her—at least, not more than by silence. Mary pursued the perilous subject no further. She lay looking very thoughtful; and at last, continued:

'Catherine, it must be a trial to be very beautiful—must it not? and it is one that poor little Geraldine will have to encounter too, though she is not like mamma—no, not a bit. Mamma looks so kind, so soft—oh! so very kind. How I love to gaze into her tender, melting eyes; and Geraldine's are almost fierce, they flash so—sometimes, I mean; sometimes they are very pretty and merry.'

'I always think, miss, that for one so young, Miss Geraldine is exactly like that beautiful print of the poor French queen who was so cruelly murdered, that hangs in your dressing-room.'

'What! Marie Antoinette? Yes, so she is. She was not fierce, Catherine. If proud by nature, (and she looks as if she were,) sorrow brought her to learn of Christ; she became meek and lowly, and her words of forgiveness of her barbarous, wicked foes, were just what fitted the disciple of Him who prayed for His murderers. I have seen her last letter on her tomb. Oh! how heavenly! that it was that made me procure her portrait. I asked mamma to get me the very best that could be had, and to put it up in my room. She was flattered and idolized for her beauty once, but it could not soften all hearts.'

'Nor keep any, Miss Mary, if it could win some.'

'No,' said Mary; 'it was not her loveliness that gained

her such fond and faithful friends—glad to die for her, or with her, if that might not be. I was not thinking about Marie Antoinette till you spoke of her, Catherine ; but I am always ready to think of her when anything leads that way. You would wonder—strangers would—*she* would—if it could be known how much she has been in the thoughts of me, a sick child, lying here—how I have loved her, and mused on her, and wept for her. I should not like to tell ; I never have,’ said the child, with increasing agitation. ‘ Sometimes, when I have looked ill, and they could see I had been crying, they could not guess why, and it was all for *her*. And, do you know, I always pray for her poor daughter—pray that she may be able to forgive those whom her mother forgave—’ Mary hid her face and sobbed with uncontrollable emotion ; ‘ and that she may see her face in Heaven ; and oh ! Catherine, how much I should like to see it there too ! ’ The girl clasped her hands, straining forwards, and gazing upwards, as if she hoped even now to pierce through the veil. Catherine quietly drew her back on her pillow.

‘ My dear child, I must not let you talk more ; you must not agitate yourself at this time of night ; it will be sure to destroy your rest, and that will deprive your mamma of the pleasure of seeing you in a sweet refreshing sleep when she comes back. You don’t know how happy she looks when she finds you so.’

‘ I can believe that,’ murmured Mary. ‘ I won’t talk any more of *them*. I did not mean, but I like to have told you too. Now you remind me of mamma, I must try to go to sleep, and put off what I really had to say ; only promise, Catherine, to listen to me at another time, and to give me the best advice you can.’

Catherine promised, and the next day saw the promise fulfilled. She did not remind Mary of her words, but she was sitting with her alone, while

Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine were gone for their afternoon drive, when Mary, after a period of silent musing, said, somewhat abruptly :

‘Catherine, last night we were talking about beauty—and about its being a trial. Do you think I should ever have been beautiful, if I had been like other girls, healthy and strong?’

‘Yes, I do,’ replied Catherine.

‘Some people think so, I know—but I have never regretted that loss. I am sure mamma loves me ; I don’t believe that she would have loved me any the more for any beauty, however great. But I have sometimes thought that I might have been clever and quick in my learning, and I cannot tell you how keen the mortification was when first I began to perceive that any abilities I naturally had were going from me. Perhaps cleverness and learning would have been too much for me—a greater trial than beauty to—to some people ; so God took away the power of acquiring any but that best knowledge which He teaches Himself. And I ought to be glad,’ she added, in a subdued tone.

‘Yes, Miss Mary,’ said Catherine, much touched ; ‘you may be glad in our Lord’s own words, for ‘many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.’’

‘Yes,’ Mary answered, quietly, ‘I am satisfied.’

And satisfied she looked, as she lay there, her hands meekly folded on her breast ; but in a few moments she started, and said :

‘It was not of myself that I was thinking—indeed it was not—but of Geraldine. Everybody says that she is wonderfully beautiful—they all tell her so even now. I am afraid she never will hear anything but flattery ; and yet I do not think that she will be loved—unless—unless she alters, Catherine, at least not by many. *We* love her of course always, and

everybody must love her sometimes. But I am not happy, not at all happy about her, and what can I do? pray for her, you will say—and so I do; but sometimes I ask myself if I could say anything to her before—before I go away and am no more seen, Catherine.'

A strange, unearthly paleness came over her face as she spoke. Catherine felt alarmed.

'Do you think that she is too young to understand me, or do you think, as I sometimes hope, that she might remember what she did not understand at the time, and profit by it later? Surely a dying sister's words would not be lightly forgotten, even by a child.'

'I should hope not,' replied Catherine, with a struggle for self-command; 'but perhaps—'

The girl raised herself to look Catherine earnestly in the face.

'You think that the time is not yet come?' she said.





CHAPTER IV.

The uncertain beauty of an April day
That now shows all the glory of the sun
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away.

SHAKESPEARE.

MARY never lost sight of the idea of expostulating with Geraldine, but really found it a very difficult task to carry out. The child, with all her faults, was very fascinating too. There was never a brighter creature than she when she was pleased. But she was a complete little tyrant ; every servant in the house feared, and many among them hated her. It could not be expected that they should relish the fact that their places depended on the caprice of a spoilt child ; they flattered her to retain them, and disliked her for having them in her power, while she gave them back no fondness for their flattery, for she found that it ministered very little to her happiness. Young as she was, already ungoverned passions made her often miserable. Angry, she wanted some vent for anger, and she vented it on her mother's domestics ; fretful, she wanted some one to tease, so she teased them ; tyrannical, she wanted some one to rule, so she domineered over them. Unfortunately, she was rarely encountered with firm opposition, or a straightforward denial. If provoked beyond endurance they would forget the respect due to her and to themselves, and then, unwilling to abide the consequences of their rashness, were abject in their apologies, and unscrupulous in falsehood. And all this moved the child to contempt, for she was wonderfully quick of perception.

Catherine took quite a different course from the beginning, and it was curious to mark Geraldine from the very hour of her arrival. The child did not like to see any one in the house to whom she was a secondary object. She tried not to understand why Catherine came, and (having shaken off her first sulky fit,) to coax her from Mary's side. Strangers powerfully attracted her ; for novelty she loved in all things. She showed Catherine her prettiest toys, met her in all sorts of winning ways, and when she found her proof against these attractions, began to give her orders which interfered with the duties which she had undertaken with regard to Mary. She was full of astonishment when she obtained neither a ready nor a complaining obedience, and when her wonder subsided she resolved to contest the point. She was not likely to conquer Catherine, who was well used to children, though not exactly of Geraldine's class or training ; and knew how to keep her ground without losing her temper, and for the first time, perhaps, Geraldine found her violence either pitied or laughed at. Mrs. Faulkner could not refrain from smiling when she heard the charges which Geraldine brought against Catherine, and received Catherine's quiet explanations, given with an unruffled face and cheerful tone, and without a shadow of doubt that her simple reasons would settle the question. The arguments Mrs. Faulkner herself employed when alone with Geraldine, were more indirect, and of a weaker nature : ' You see, my dear, you have everything that you want ; you have your own nurse who has nothing to do but to obey you. I sent for Catherine on purpose to be with Mary, that her good-natured face might cheer her, that she might read to her, and amuse her.'

' I like to read to her, and to amuse her myself,' said Geraldine ; and so she did, and undoubtedly she was at times the source of great amusement and delight to the sick girl, and could recognise for herself that she had no happier hours than those in which she sub-

mitted to the strict control of Catherine, whom she began to understand, and relinquished the vain hope of taking her at a disadvantage.

She would come from the garden in the bright summer days, crowned with flowers, and her lap full of them, and pouring them out on Mary's couch would sit beside her and weave her gay garlands. Then was she smiling and lovely as the queen of the May, and Mary would gaze on her with delighted eyes, and exclaim :—

‘Oh ! Geraldine, be always good-tempered. Are you not happier so ?’

‘Yes, much happier ; why can't it always be ? It is because people tease me.’

And she hid her rosy cheek on Mary's pillow. One day when the sisters were thus engaged, there came into the room good, honest, dull Charlotte, the housemaid, bearing a little cup with Mary's bitter potion in it. Catherine was busy, and, for a wonder, sent another with it. Mary drank it off without one word, and gave back the cup, saying, ‘Thank you, Charlotte.’

Geraldine watched her with astonishment. ‘How can you say ‘thank you,’ for that nasty stuff, Mary, and how can you take it ?’

Mary smiled, and was going to speak, but Geraldine had darted from her side, her eyes flashing, her cheeks glowing ; she caught Charlotte by the gown, shook her, struggled with her, struck her :

‘You stupid, clumsy creature ! Your horrid great feet ! My beautiful wreath—my lovely wreath—which I had just made for Mary ! How I hate you ! You did it on purpose. You walked straight over it just to vex me.’

‘Dear me ! Miss Geraldine, how can you say so ? I am sure I'd not ha' hurt a thing belonging to Miss Mary,’ said the girl, an indignant tear starting to her eye.

‘There—I knew it—you don't care what harm you

do to *my* things. Get away. Mary, why don't you scold her? Don't you see how disappointed I am?

'Oh! Geraldine, if you could feel how much more you grieve me than Charlotte can!'

'Then that is very unkind of you. I only care because your wreath is spoilt, and this is the return you make!' Geraldine went away weeping, and Mrs. Faulkner could not help seeing, she said, 'that dear, good Mary did not understand how sensitive Geraldine was, and often hurt her feelings without intending it.'

'I don't know, ma'am,' replied Catherine, somewhat bluntly; 'I think Miss Geraldine's temper is bad as well as her heart tender; and if she suffers in her feelings, I am quite sure that Miss Mary does in her health, and some way must be found to prevent these violent scenes happening before her. I assure you their effect is very bad.'

'If Geraldine thought that she hurt her sister, that would weigh more with her than any rebukes.'

'I hope so, ma'am; but I don't see that anything affects her long; and I wish that you would be good enough to let me make some rules about her coming into Miss Mary's room.'

'If you really think this necessary,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, reluctantly.

'It is wonderful what Mrs. Irving takes on herself,' observed Mrs. Collinson; 'I shall really expect to hear her ask next to make some rules about your visiting Miss Mary, ma'am.'

'And if you do, Collinson,' returned Mrs. Faulkner, in a tone that surprised and silenced her; 'if you do, you will see me obey them. No one can love or understand my poor child better than Catherine does. I am deeply grateful to her.'

Mrs. Faulkner really felt what she said, and when spring came, and the house at Brighton was to be given up, it was with genuine tears and words which, flowing from honied lips, had their source in the heart, that

she implored Catherine, as if life and death hung on her answer, not to forsake the child ; not to rob her of a treasure just as she knew its worth, but to accompany them in their return to Lascelles, their home. Catherine asked a little time to consider, and to consult her parents, and their long tried friend, Mrs. Norton ; not but that her own heart had prompted her to anticipate the request, and to concur in it. From the first, Mrs. Faulkner's fascinations had made a strong impression on Catherine. All gave her back a portion of the sweetness which she lavished on all, but Catherine really gave deep and earnest love. Her character was marked by extreme generosity and a rare delicacy and tact, and she made such candid acknowledgments of her follies and her forgetfulness, and what might seem to some almost bordering on insincerities, as disarmed severity. She would come to be helped with such a pretty childishness when she had got into some great difficulty : 'entirely by my own fault ;—I have been so very silly—so very imprudent.' This was a powerful mode of appeal to one of Catherine's high spirit, ready sense, and helpfulness. She could not help feeling that if she kept her post at her mistress's side, she might perhaps save her many troubles, lighten many trials, become very useful to her, very dear. Her heart glowed at the thought, and she wished to stay with Mrs. Faulkner, not only for Mary's sake, that was a consideration apart and altogether different, but just for Mrs. Faulkner's own sake.

'It seems almost silly and fanciful ; and what is worse, presumptuous, perhaps,' she said to herself ; and she tried to state the case dispassionately to her parents, and not till their answer was given, did she whisper to her mother :

'I can hardly tell how it is, mother ; I do love Mrs. Faulkner very much : if I am to leave you, I am glad it is to go with her.'

'Why, she has been so unboundedly generous to us, one and all, no wonder you feel grateful ; and then the

sick young lady—it is not surprising that you are bent on being with her,’ said Mrs. Irving; and Catherine answered, ‘Very true;’ and yet she felt that after all it was not what she meant.

‘I shall be glad for you to go to Lascelles,’ said Mrs. Norton; ‘I think that you will be of great value there. I shall like to know that you are near Mary. It will be good for all of them.’ Mary was very quiet; she added no supplications to those of her mother—made not one appeal to Catherine’s pity or love.

‘You will ask your parents about it, will you not, Catherine?’ she said, and when Catherine communicated their acquiescence, Mary was very quiet still.

Geraldine, after dancing round the room with delight, threw herself down on her sister’s couch, and cried with indignation:

‘I thought it would make you happy to have Catherine, and now you don’t seem pleased in the least.’

Mary’s eyes glistened a little at being thus misunderstood. She held out her hand to Catherine, and said, ‘Am I not pleased?’

‘Yes,’ replied Catherine, undoubtingly.

‘I don’t believe,’ exclaimed Geraldine, ‘that she so much as asked you to stay. And I—if I beg you a hundred times to do what I want, you refuse; and for Mary, without a word, you do whatever you find out she desires. Now did you ask her never to leave you, Mary?’

‘No,’ said Mary, in a low voice, ‘I should not have liked to have asked her that.’

‘I am sure that it would be a very cruel, hard-hearted thing to do so, when mamma says that she has never known anything do you so much good as having Catherine with you. You must not, you shall not, leave her.’

‘I don’t intend it at present, Miss Geraldine.’



CHAPTER V.

Dreams, books, are each a world ; and books we know
Are a substantial world, both pure and good
Hence have I genial seasons, hence have I
Smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous thought :
And thus from day to day my little boat
Rocks in its harbour, lodging peaceably.
Blessings be with them and eternal praise
Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares—
The Poets who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays.

WORDSWORTH.

LASCELLES was a country seat, distant a few miles from London, lately passed from the possession of an old family which had parted with every estate belonging to it one by one. It wore therefore no uncomfortable air of novelty. There was even old timber ; strange that it should have been allowed to stand long enough to become so ; yet here Cowley might have sung his verses :—

‘ Hail, old patrician trees, so great and good !
Hail, ye plebeian underwood !
Where the poetic birds rejoice,
And for their quiet nests and plenteous food,
Pay with their grateful voice.’

The last possessor had gloried in his oaks, and they still honoured the ground. He was a childless man, and his nephew, on succeeding him, found decided that he could do no better than sell the place as it stood to Mr. Faulk-

ner, the wealthy merchant, who was then looking out for one in the vicinity of London, from consideration of the health of his wife and her declining child.

Lascelles exactly suited Mrs. Faulkner's taste, after her husband had allowed her to spend as much money as she pleased in renovating it with great judgment; repairing, restoring, beautifying everything, but modernising nothing. She was at last very proud of it and of herself, and yet in spite of her love for it, half her time was spent on the road which led her from her home to join the aristocratic circle of friends in London, who used to know and pity her as 'that poor, pretty Mrs. Eustace,' and who still condescended to recognise her as the rich Mrs. Faulkner; a condescension which unhappily pleased and flattered both her and her husband, great as was the encroachment which it made on their domestic enjoyments.

At Lascelles as at Brighton, Geraldine was almost constantly with her mother, and Catherine with Mary. Geraldine, by stamps, outcries, threats to throw herself down stairs, or out of windows, or to starve herself to death, had effectually triumphed over nursery-maids, gradually emancipated herself from nursery governesses, and when her mother drove up to town, usually accompanied her, because she was too troublesome to be left at home. This was just as Geraldine meant it should be.

There was a very extensive library of valuable books at Lascelles, and in this room Mary and Catherine soon manifested an intention chiefly to establish themselves. Catherine proposed that to them should be allotted the too long neglected task of sorting the volumes.

'We are not equal to classing them as they ought to be classed, ma'am, I know that,' she said; 'but if we make a careful catalogue, perhaps Mr. Faulkner will show it to some one who understands such matters, and we could proceed under his directions.'

Mrs. Faulkner was charmed with the idea.

‘What a nice work for you,’ she cried. ‘And the longer it lasts, the better. The next time I go to town I will order you the most delightful pair of library steps, like those the dear old Don, Dr. L—— showed me ; and Mary’s couch shall be placed here in the window, where she can look out into the garden for refreshment, if she ever does tire of these musty old volumes ; but I really believe she loves them better than Geraldine does her bright flowers.’

‘Oh ! mamma, differently—quite differently. I do love the flowers and the trees, and if I could run out there to Geraldine, I should very often throw aside my books. I always think when I read that story of Lady Jane Grey, that had I been well and strong, I should have liked to have been out with the hunting party.’

Mrs. Faulkner looked on Mary with fond pity, and heard her words with surprise. It was difficult to discover a very high-spirited, animated disposition under Mary’s patient subjection to suffering. Catherine had begun to guess at it, from the enthusiasm with which she read such narratives as called it up, and thus to take account of the many privations which the less observant believed Mary to be indifferent to. Geraldine would often exclaim :—

‘It does not signify to Mary ; she does not care for that sort of thing—but to me !’

And Mrs. Faulkner acquiesced in this view, and actually believed that every trifling denial, delay, or inconvenience, was more severely felt by her impetuous Geraldine than the daily pressure of the cross of sickness was by her patient Mary.

‘Geraldine feels disappointment so keenly : she can’t endure the least suspense, poor child ! Her sensibility is too acute.’

All this might be—nay, was very true. But who recognised the unexpressed feelings of Mary ? In full measure He alone who could respond to the mute appeal of her upward glance ; Catherine drew

nearest to the sick girl, and afforded her a solace which even her mother's love had not ministered. In fact, at this period, Mrs. Faulkner could not fathom the depths of her daughter's mind, nor understand the sources of her patience and increasing joy. An instance of this occurred one day, when entering, she found Mary more absorbed than her delicate consideration of others often allowed her to be, in the perusal of a volume which had become one of her greatest favourites and constant companions.

'What ! my Mary ! not a word for me ! When I am gone, and go I must, you can pore over your book again.'

'Oh ! yes, dearest mamma, I can ; and indeed I have as many words for you as you like, but just at the moment—'

'You would rather that I did not disturb you, my child ?' said Mrs. Faulkner, a little hurt.

'But why need it be interruption ? I only meant that I should like much better to read you these words than to speak any of my own. They make me so happy.' She held her mother's hand fast and fondly.

'Well, Mary dear, read ; I love to hear you, if you are sure that it won't be too much for you.'

'Oh, no !' and Mary, whose treasure was Walton's *Lives*, began :

'This is about Herbert, mamma, the good, gentle George Herbert ; what he said when he was dying — 'in the time of his decay,' when he would often speak to this purpose : 'I now look back upon the pleasures of my life past, and see that the content I have taken in beauty, wit, music, and pleasant conversation, are all now past by me like a dream, or a shadow which returns not, and are all become dead to me, or I to them ; and I see that as my father and generation hath done before me, so I also shall now, suddenly, like Job, make my bed in the dark ; and I praise God I am prepared for it. And I praise Him that I am not to learn patience now

I stand in such need of it, and that I have practised mortification and endeavoured to die daily that I might not die eternally. And, my hope is, that I shall shortly leave this valley of tears and be free from all fevers and pains, and which will be a more happy condition ; I shall be free from sin, and all the temptations and anxieties which attend it ; and this being past, I shall dwell in the New Jerusalem, dwell there with men made perfect, dwell where these eyes shall see my Master and Saviour Jesus, and with Him see my dear mother and all my relations and friends. But I must die, or not come to that happy place. And this is my content that I am going daily towards it, and that every day I have lived has taken a part of my appointed time from me, and that I shall live the less time for having lived this and the day past.'

A burst of tears from Mrs. Faulkner checked Mary's reverent tones ; bending over her child she kissed her passionately again and again, saying, when more composed :

'My Mary, you must not read such sad books ; they you harm, I am convinced.'

'Sad ? oh ! mamma, you do not call that sad ?' She placed her hands upon her breast, and drew a deep breath ; 'You do not know the good it does me.'

'My child, I could not bear this myself, indeed I could not ; it would destroy me—I am sure of it.'

Mrs. Faulkner could not recover the pain thus occasioned her ; she afterwards took an opportunity of saying to Catherine :

'Catherine, you are a good girl ; do try to cheer Mary and to make her more lively. Don't let her pore over those books too long ;—and that one which she has taken up lately, do put it a little aside, without her noticing it, if you can.'

Catherine knew that she could not, but she did not give any immediate reply.

'Mamma, you are always so generous to me,' said Mary, not long afterwards ; 'and you will think I am

growing greedy, but I do want to ask you a favour ; and then it is instead of something else that I am accustomed to have.' Mary smiled, but her manner all the while was earnest, even anxious.

'My dearest child, I am glad that you can think of anything to ask for ; it is difficult to get you to do so ; now Geraldine will fix on a hundred things in a minute,' replied Mrs. Faulkner. 'Come, let me hear your wish. If it can be gratified, Mary, you don't doubt what my answer will be.'

'No, mamma,' said Mary, slowly. She did not doubt that her mother would grant her wishes with kindness, but she feared that she would not accede just exactly according to the plan which she had framed. Moreover, she was as shy of expressing them as if they deserved a rebuke, which she was, however, sure that they did not.

'I have talked to Catherine about it,' she continued, hesitatingly.

'And can't you speak as easily to me as to Catherine?' inquired Mrs. Faulkner, in a tone that had a tinge of annoyance in it.

'Oh ! yes, I can, dear mother. I will tell you at once, then. It is, that I should like, if you please, that you should let me have some little allowance of my own, instead of all the beautiful things you are always bringing me from London. I could do without them very well.'

'Could you, my child ? I should have thought that you could do much better without the other. What possible use can you make of money ?'

'I think I know,' replied Mary, colouring, and speaking low. 'If you would let Catherine give it away for me.'

'Give it away ? to whom ?'

'Oh ! there are many ; she knows some, she can find out more ; and I have been longing, mother dear, to have something of my very own,—that cost me something, I mean—that I must deny myself to procure—

in order that I might have to give to the afflicted—to the poor in Christ.’

Mary’s voice sunk quite into a whisper.

‘So I have thought on this way,’ she added ; ‘but you will defeat it quite, if you go on giving to me just the same as before. Don’t you see, dearest mamma?’

Her mother could not speak ; she held her child’s hand in hers, and seemed lost in looking at and caressing the thin fingers. At last she said :

‘My dear child, of course you don’t think for a moment that your papa does not give freely to the poor out of his wealth? His donations are quite munificent. I can’t tell you how many charitable institutions he subscribes to.’

‘Ah ! yes, I feel so glad when I think of that. He is very generous.’

‘Very. And here, too, at Lascelles, there is a great deal given every year.’

‘I know ; but I can’t feel that it is exactly the same for me. If I were well and strong, then papa could make me his little almoner, you know,’ exclaimed Mary, with a smile of exquisite enjoyment at the fancied happiness. ‘I could go to the houses of these poor people and read to them if they were sick, and talk to them about the comfort of thinking of Heaven. There would be many things that I could do for them then, and I should want the money less perhaps ; at least, I mean I should not care so much about having some of my own ; but now, lying here, I can only pray for them, and ask Catherine to give them something for me. Then, mamma, they will come to know me and to pray for me, and to thank God that He has put it into the sick girl’s heart to think of finding them out. Oh ! what great gain every way ! Who knows what gain ? Who knows, mother, what sweet ‘songs in the night’ this may bring to all our hearts !’

The girl raised her eyes to Heaven as if some notes of the angelic choir reached her thence.

‘My dearest child, everything shall be as you wish ; you shall have whatever you like to ask for.’

Mrs. Faulkner betrayed uneasiness while Mary spoke with delight of what she would have done in personal ministering to the poor, had health and strength been allotted to her. One of her weak points was touched. She had a nervous terror of infection, which in case of sickness would have withheld her from crossing the threshold of the cleanliest abode of poverty ; and if she felt this for herself, she felt it with redoubled force for her children. Neither argument nor entreaty would have induced her to allow Mary to run such risks as rose up before her imagination ; but what the girl spoke of was impracticable ; therefore Mrs. Faulkner, who always avoided dispute or contest, if possible, did not discuss the subject. Reliance on Catherine’s good sense and prudence led her to assent to Mary’s proposal, with the stipulation that she should never think of taking Geraldine with her.

‘You must not, either of you, put these ideas into Geraldine’s head ; she is much too young and too delicate. I would not trifle with her health for the world. It is bad enough to see you, Mary.’ And Mrs. Faulkner wept.

Then, again, Mrs. Faulkner had a great deal too much delicacy to bear the sight of physical suffering. One day, when it was necessary to bleed Mary, she fainted. She had tried to come into the room, because the poor child, rather startled at the sudden proposal of something new to her, had said, ‘Oh ! mamma, you will be by me !’

Mary had a fancy that she might bleed to death, founded on a romantic story in the *Spectator*, which she had been reading ; but as the old apothecary who operated on her had fortunately more self-possession than the ill-fated lover therein mentioned, no such mischief ensued. She was not given to irrational fears, and, heartily grieved to see how much suffering her request had caused her mother, never made a similar one again.



CHAPTER VI.

Hir herte is very chambre of holinesse,
Hir hand ministre of freedom for almesse.

CHAUCER.

‘MAMMA,’ said Mary, the following evening, ‘would you think me very fanciful if I were to show you some beautiful verses which Catherine and I read when we were arranging the library? I have been fond of them ever since.’

‘I should like to see them, dearest.’

‘They are in Spenser, mamma, his *Faerie Queene*—that nice old quarto, with red-edged leaves, and worm-eaten—only think! and there are such pretty engravings in it of Una and her faithful lion, and the little babe, and kind Sir Guyon!’

‘Do you think that Geraldine would like to hear them too? Shall I call her while you find the place, and let her sit at my feet while I read?’

‘Oh, but, mamma,’ replied Mary, thoughtfully, ‘you said I never was to put anything into her head like what we were talking of this morning. Now these verses would be sure to do that; they did into mine. I don’t mean that they made me think of it before anything else. Those words, ‘Ye do it unto Me’—are much greater than human words, of course; but they did lead me to form a plan, a sort of scheme; and I shall be much happier when it is accomplished,’ added Mary, leaning back and drawing a deep breath.

‘Then, Mary, you and I will have the verses all quietly to ourselves,’ replied her mother, her interest

and curiosity awakened in what had so powerfully impressed her child's mind.

'You see, mamma, it is about the Red-cross Knight,' cried Mary, eagerly turning over the leaves.

'And on his brest a bloudie crosse he bore,
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead, as living, ever Him adored.
Upon his shield the like was also scored,
For soveraine hope which in His helpe he had ;
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word ;
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad :
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.

What a 'soveraine hope' his was ! Mamma, don't you remember you used to be afraid that I should be sad from reading books which told me it was blessed to suffer ? and you see, so this knight *seemed* 'too solemmn sad,' but it was all seeming. When he grew near his victory—when he was listening to Fidelia, and to Speranza, he was not sorrowful then ; only hear :

'The faithfull knight now grew in little space
By hearing her, and by her sister's lore,
To such perfection of all heavenly grace,
That wretched world he gan for to abhorre,
And mortal life gan loath as thing forlore.

Mamma, does that make you cry ?

'Never mind, my child, I want to hear it all.'

'This is what you must read to me.'

Mrs. Faulkner, following Mary's finger, began :

* 'Eftsoones unto an holy hospitall
That was fore by the way, she did him bring,
In which seven Bead-men that had vowed all
Their life to service of high Heaven's King,
Did spend their dayes in doing godly thing :

* Canto x. stanza xxxvi. first book.

Their gates to all were open evermore,
That by the wearie way were travelling,
And one sate wayting ever them before
To call in comers by that needy were and poore.

‘The first of them that eldest was and best,
Of all the house had charge and government,
As guardian and steward of the rest ;
His office was to give entertainment
And lodging unto all that came and went ;
Not unto such as could him feast againe,
And double quite for that he on them spent ;
But such as want of harbour did constraine,
Those for God’s sake his duty was to entertaine.

‘The second was as Alm’ner of the place.
His office was the hungry for to feed,
And thirsty give to drinke,—a work of grace.
He feared not once himself to be in need,
Ne cared to hoard for those whom he did breed ;
The grace of God he laid up still in store,
Which as a stock, he left unto his seed.
He had enough ; what need him care for more ?
And had he lesse, yet some he would give to the poore.

‘The third had of their wardrobe custodie,
In which were not rich tyres, nor garments gay,
The plumes of pride and wings of vanitie,
But clothes meet to keepe keene cold away,
And naked nature seemely to array,
With which bare wretched wights he dayly clad,
The images of God in earthly clay ;
And if that no spare clothes to give he had,
His own coate he would cut, and it distribute glad.

‘The fourth appointed by his office was
Poore prisoners to relieve with gracious aid,
And captives to redeeme with price of brass
From Turkes and Sarazins which them had stayd ;
And though they faulty were, yet well he wayed
That God to us forgiveth every hour

Much more than that why they in bands were layd,
And He that harrowed hell with heavie stour,
The faulty souls from thence brought to His heavenly bower.

‘The fifth had charge sick persons to attend,
And comfort those in point of death which lay,
For them most needeth comfort in the end,
When sin, and hell, and death do most dismay
The feeble soule departing hence away.
All is but lost that living we bestow
If not well ended at our dying day.
Oh! man, have mind of that last bitter throw;
For as the tree does fall, so lies it ever low.

‘The sixth had charge of them now being dead,
In seemly sort their corses to engrave,
And deck with dainty flowers their bridal bed,
That to their heavenly spouse both sweet and brave
They might appear when He their soules shall save.
The wondrous workmanship of God’s own mould,
Whose face he made all beastes to feare, and gave
All in his hand, even dead we honor should.
Ah, dearest God me grant, I dead be not defoul’d.

‘The seventh now after death and burial done,
Had charge the tender orphans of the dead
And widows aid, least they should be undone;
In face of judgment he their cause would plead,
Ne aught the powre of mighty men did dread
In their defence, nor would for gold or fee
Be wonne their rightful causes downe to tread:
And when they stood in most necessitee
He did supply their want and gave them ever free.’

While Mrs. Faulkner read, Mary lay with folded hands, her eyes sometimes fixed on her mother, sometimes closed,—with an expression of delight beaming on her face. Mrs. Faulkner recognised it, and feared to break the charm which called it there. But Mary now broke in of her own accord.

‘There, mother, ever since I first read these lines, I have thought that nothing could fill me with such joy as to be enabled to do each and all of these works of mercy before the tree falls; and I do not see any impossibility—do you? And no one in the world could help me better than Catherine, whom you gave to me to be my help and comfort. I have always thanked you and Mrs. Norton for bringing her. I have been much happier since she came.’

‘Then you were not happy before, my child?’ asked Mrs. Faulkner, with a pang of jealousy, or self-reproach, or she knew not what.

‘Yes, I was happy; a little lonely sometimes. It is pleasant to have her to turn to, and to find her always ready to talk with me of those things which I care most for; she has done me a great deal of good in many ways.’

‘Done *you* good, Mary!’

‘I hope so,’ said Mary, devoutly.

Mrs. Faulkner supplied with a lavish hand this new want of Mary’s, who accomplished everything to her satisfaction except the checking of the tide of presents.

‘My dear child,’ said her mother, ‘pray don’t say any more to me about sacrifice; your life is one perpetual sacrifice. I can’t bear it.’ And Mr. Faulkner was influenced by a similar feeling; for he, too, was extremely fond of Mary, and indeed with good reason. Her manner to him expressed the sincerest gratitude and respect. She welcomed his customary visit with a cheerful smile of affection. ‘So good of him,’ she said, ‘to come to see me evening after evening. When he arrives here, wearied with business, and wants to be amused a little, (for he is very grave,) he quits Geraldine’s bright smiles and playful ways, and dear mamma, and comes to my sofa to hear the same dull answer always. Is it not kind, Catherine?’

‘Yes, Miss Mary. I am sure that he likes to come, and that he loves you very much; and as to your answer, it is not dull.’

So strongly impressed was Mary with the idea that Mr. Faulkner needed refreshment in his few home hours, that she carefully abstained from repeating to him her tale of constant suffering. Mrs. Faulkner shrank from the subject, or if she approached, always gave it a false colouring. It was Catherine who frankly, from time to time, replied to the interrogations which Mr. Faulkner addressed to her, with a secret confidence of hearing the truth from her lips alone. Once she observed :

‘I have not spoken to my mistress so plainly as to you, sir.’

‘Nor ought that to be necessary,’ returned Mr. Faulkner. ‘Surely she always sees the medical men herself; they ought to set the truth before her.’

Catherine made no answer.

‘Don’t you believe that they do so?’

‘Why, sir, I think that my mistress, without meaning it, perhaps, has a way of stopping their mouths. She is so afraid of what they might say, that she speaks first, and then she puts all she tells them in the fairest light; every little improvement on which she can ground a hope, she brings forward, and the rest she throws into the shade, as you may see.’

‘Just so,’ said Mr. Faulkner, half audibly. ‘Just so. I know Diane.—And the poor child herself?’

‘I don’t think, sir, that she calculates time much. In this, as in everything else, she shows a wonderful patience. I do not believe that to Heaven, any more than to us, she cries, ‘How long?’ She lies there waiting—her thoughts so fixed on Eternity that, by comparison, nothing here seems long. Weary as are the hours of sickness, I do not hear her sigh for release. I came one night to her side when she could not refrain from feverish tossing, and asked her if there were anything I could get for her, just to make a change; she looked up piteously in my face, and said, ‘If I could sleep!’ almost instantly she added, ‘but I shall sleep soon in Jesus.’ And then she grew quiet.’

Mr. Faulkner bent down his head on the mantel-piece, and Catherine watched the emotion which he could not conceal, with those feelings which the emotion of the strong man awakens in us.

‘Leave me now,’ he said, after a few moments. ‘I shall not come to her this evening.’

‘She sets great store by your visits, sir,’ replied Catherine, respectfully.

‘Does she?’

‘Oh! yes, sir.’ And Catherine repeated some of the expressions which Mary constantly used concerning them.

‘Well, I shall come,’ said Mr. Faulkner, after listening thoughtfully. ‘I will not miss any that remain at my command.’

He appeared in Mary’s room a little later than usual, and she immediately discovered the traces of recent emotion on his countenance. She replied as usual to his inquiries, but did not let go his hand, and looked very wistful.

‘Well, Mary,’ said he, trying to smile, ‘what is it?’

‘Perhaps I ought not to say, I am afraid you are in trouble, dearest papa. Is it wrong in me to notice it—to wish to know why?’

‘No, Mary, not wrong. You are quick in observing.’

‘Oh! one sees every change in the faces one loves.’

‘And you do love mine?’

‘Papa, can you ask it?—as if you did not know!’

‘Yes, yes, my dear child; I know it well; and I love you, Mary, and therefore it grieves me——’

‘I hope it is not about me that you have been grieving? You must not do that.’

‘But if I can’t, sometimes, help it?’

‘You must help it, as I do, papa. I love myself too well to grieve over my short sufferings here—my greatest earthly good, I know they are; and you must love me too well to grieve for me.’ Mary smiled with angelic sweetness. ‘I have wished very much to speak to you *once*, papa. Let it be to-night, may it?’

‘Yes, Mary ; to-night.’

‘Well, only a few words—I don’t want to pain you. I know you can’t bear thanks, but I should like to tell you how grateful I have ever felt for your kindness, and how I have thought more and more of it, lying here——’

‘Mary, Mary, I can’t listen to this——’

‘Only just let me say one word about your kindness to mamma—to my sister—to all ; and your new generosity to me lately. Though I make you cry now, some time you will like to remember these few words, I think.’

‘My dear child, is there anything on earth I can do for you, now, or later ?’

‘Yes, papa—if I may ask——’

‘Whatever you will.’

‘Why, then—that you won’t let the poor feel as if they had experienced a loss—and—that you will be patient with Geraldine, if she should not be very docile. It is not likely that she will be quite as quiet and as tractable as if she had ever suffered or been thwarted any way ; but her heart is noble indeed !’ Mary sank back, exhausted by exertion and the agitating nature of the topic. Mr. Faulkner called Catherine, in alarm. ‘Good night, my child, good night.’ And he quitted her. When he rejoined Mrs. Faulkner, she was moving uneasily about the room, disturbed by his prolonged absence. His looks did not reassure her. He was a silent man ; this evening more so than usual. Mrs. Faulkner wished to enliven him, yet dreaded to make the attempt. She began to talk on various trifling subjects ; then of her future engagements,—of a brilliant ball to be given by the Duchess of ——, of a déjeuner two days hence, weather permitting. ‘I may take Geraldine with me there. She is enough of a child still to pass as one.’

All these communications on Mrs. Faulkner’s part scarcely elicited a remark from her husband, but at this last he cleared his throat, with evident disap-

probation, and a dead silence ensued. Mrs. Faulkner changed colour.

‘Augustus,’ she said, suddenly, ‘I don’t know what is the matter—something, I am sure. Have you any objection to what I have been saying? any reason for wishing me to do differently from what I have proposed?’

‘I should advise you to think, before you involve yourself in all these engagements,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, drily.

‘Think?—of what?’ Diane faltered, with a look of consternation; then laid her hand on her husband’s arm: ‘Don’t torture me, Augustus. Do you find Mary worse to-night?’

‘Not particularly to-night,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, softened by her unfeigned accents of alarm and distress, although previously he had felt something approaching to disgust and anger at the necessity there seemed to be of his suggesting more attention to the rapid change which was taking place. ‘But surely, Diane, you can’t be blind to the alteration in her?’

Mrs. Faulkner gazed on him with a look of helpless woe. He regretted the pain which he saw that his words inflicted, and began to temper them.

‘Speak to Catherine about this. I don’t want to alarm you, my love.’

‘The illness of my dear child unnerves me terribly,’ sobbed Diane, bending down her head on her husband’s shoulder, and beginning to weep. ‘Poor Mary could not bear to see me always with red eyes. I go out to refresh my spirits a little, and then I come back to her, and it does her good. Besides, I take Geraldine out of the way.’

Mr. Faulkner did not stop to inquire into the meaning of this last sentence, though it sounded strangely. He saw that what his wife said was sincere, though weak; and he more easily forgave the evident want of strength of mind than he had the apparent absence of tenderness of feeling.



CHAPTER VII.

I trow that to a norice in this case
It had been hard this ruthe for to see.
Well might a mother then have cryed alas !

CHAUCER.

MRS. FAULKNER could not shake off the uneasiness occasioned by this conversation with her husband, and by Catherine's refusal to tell her that Mr. Faulkner was quite mistaken. If the ensuing week had not been favourable to Mary beyond expectation, she would have given up all idea of the déjeuner. As it was, Mary caught some words respecting it, and showed so much feverish excitement and pain at the thought of the plan being relinquished on her account, that even Mr. Faulkner and Catherine arrived at the conclusion that it was best for her mother and Geraldine to go.

The morning came, and Mary did not say that to-day was not as yesterday. Mrs. Faulkner, before quitting her, pressed her to her bosom time after time. Geraldine danced round her, beautifully dressed, and beautiful to look upon, eager to depart, and promising to return with much to tell. After the carriage wheels were quite out of hearing, Mary turned to Catherine with tearful eyes :

‘I am afraid that I have not done quite right ; that makes me unhappy. I was not perfectly true. When mamma asked me how I was, I said, ‘much the same.’ Oh, Catherine ! I fear I did very wrong. If anything were to happen, and mamma were to be blamed,—it would all be my fault, not hers ; remember that, and

tell papa. I did not think I should ever begin a day again—this praying for another—hoping not to be called before night. Nor would this be if I had done nothing wrong. That alone can make children want their Father to defer His call.'

But Mary had still days before her, though her mother could no longer doubt that they were few in number ; and whatever might be the trial of abiding in her sick room, she now recognised that to be long or often absent from it was one yet more severe. The increase of leisure thus afforded to Catherine Mary strenuously urged her to bestow in visiting those poor and sick persons in whom she had become individually interested ; particularly one, the daughter of a small farmer, who had returned to her home with the same malady as Mary's, and needed not so much the aid which her wealth could bestow, as such consolation as the presence of Catherine could afford. The interest and love which these two young girls had grown to feel for each other without ever meeting, was singularly touching. Day by day kind words were transmitted by Catherine ; day by day the same portions of Scripture infused comfort into either bosom, and their messages were very commonly indications of the verse or sentence which appeared fraught with peculiar meaning. Many a holy thought and fervent prayer owed their being to this intercommunion ; and Mary and Deborah, while they knew not each others' faces on earth, looked forward with earnest desire to recognition in Heaven. It was not as yet possible for mortal eye to discern which would soonest reach the goal. Sometimes, at dawn of day, Catherine crossed the heath to pass an hour or two at Deborah's bedside, and yet to return almost before the household at Lascelles were fully awake. One of these visits Catherine prolonged till near noon ; on entering the house she was about to take her way to Mary's room, when she met Mrs. Faulkner, pale to ghastliness, and in tears. Scarce able to support herself,

she beckoned Catherine, caught her arm, and drew her into the nearest apartment.

‘They have been here, Catherine,’ she said, in a tone of hopeless anguish,

‘Who, ma’am?—The physicians?’

‘Yes, yes!—why were you absent?’

Catherine made no reply.

‘It is cruel to leave me now but for one moment, when they tell me *she* is leaving me for ever. Oh, my angel! Mary, my child, my child, Mary!’ and Mrs. Faulkner gave way to a burst of the wildest grief. When a little recovered, she sobbed—

‘Catherine, you must go to her—I cannot. You must tell her—I will not.’

‘What would you have me tell?’ asked Catherine, in a suppressed voice.

‘What they have been barbarous enough to tell me—that before to-morrow——’ Mrs. Faulkner’s voice was choked with tears.

‘Can you bear that any but your own tongue should speak this?’ inquired Catherine, in the same tone as before.

‘Any tongue but mine,’ gasped Mrs. Faulkner; ‘I should die—I would rather die—’

‘Is it possible?’ said Catherine, with surprise. Mrs. Faulkner sank on her knees.

‘You drive me wild—distracted—for mercy’s sake do as I would have you—you, only, Catherine, only you; for this I have detained you here; fail me not at the last moment—have pity—have pity!’

Catherine raised her up, and placed her on the sofa, nearly exhausted.

‘What there is to be done, I will do. Be satisfied.’

Mrs. Faulkner caught her hand, kissed it in token of thankfulness, and pointed to the door.

Catherine moved away with a sign of acquiescence, and going to Mary’s room, found her lying in her lily-like whiteness, her hands resting on the sheets, more than ordinarily still and serene.

At the sight of Catherine, she raised herself partially, and in a low tone of inquiry, exclaimed 'Deborah?'

Catherine came near, and sat down by the bed. 'Gone,' was the sole syllable that she uttered. Mary looked upwards in silence. A tear stole down Catherine's cheek; Mary turned and took her hand.

'Gone first, dear Catherine,' she said. Then added, 'but only a little while.—'A little while and ye shall see Me!'' she continued, after a pause, in accents of deepest reverence and joy.

'Even so,' replied Catherine, sinking on her knees, and for a moment burying her face on the dying girl's pillow. She raised her face, and Mary was instantly struck by its expression.

'Catherine,' she said, 'you see a change in me, and I feel it.'

'A change has taken place,' replied Catherine, solemnly, 'and I have promised your mother to acquaint you with it,' she added, with a little hesitation.

'Poor mamma!' exclaimed Mary—'she could not! But, dearest Catherine, what is there new in what you are saying? Did you think that I required to be *told* of this?'

'Scarcely,' answered Catherine; 'at least I knew that you would not 'count it strange.''

'No, indeed, nor unexpected; does she?'

'That is hardly possible; but grief—natural grief, must prevail for awhile,' said Catherine, with a faltering voice.

Mary did not answer; an expression of extreme pity came across her face, and, when she next spoke, it was very faintly.

'I have not much to do; once more I am resolved to speak to Geraldine—once more, but only a few words—they must suffice now—I have spoken many. May these last abide with her! Do you prepare and fetch her here. And then I should like to see Mr.

Ormonde' (the clergyman of the parish of Lascelles) 'again ; I want to recommend mamma to his care ; and after that, dearest Catherine, promise me that I shall be very quiet.'

Catherine promised, and resolved to strain every nerve to accomplish that promise. Throughout that day there was no mistress at Lascelles save Catherine; whatever was to be done was done by her with a prompt fortitude, but with so much tenderness and sympathy mixed with her decision, and self-command, and tone of authority, that all felt comfort and support in relying on her. Her first hard task was to control Geraldine, who listened to her words with incredulity.

'Mary is not going to leave us. You, and those doctors like to make mamma miserable and me too. She had a beautiful pink colour on her cheeks last night—and so soon?—it can't be—go away—I won't hear you—cruel.' And the child threw herself on her face in her stormy grief.

'But you will not refuse to hear *her* ? and if you wish to do that, you must try to calm yourself—you would not dare to let her see you thus—you love her too well not to give her all your thoughts now ; it would make you miserable not to go to her.'

'Yes, yes, it would,' sobbed Geraldine.

'Then pray for power to compose yourself—grace to listen to her in such a way as shall not harm her, and shall profit you.'

'Pray with me.'

Geraldine rose, awed into silence. When she sat by Mary's side there was an expression of fear and wonder mingled with sorrow on her face. The words of Mary were few and simple. 'The servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men ;' that was their import.

'I have often spoken to you before, more fully, dearest sister,' she said. 'Try to remember what I have said, as if it were part of what I say now—my

breath—you see. We must part here, my dear one, precious to each and all of us ; and, (oh ! Geraldine keep that in mind) how dear, how precious to Him above. Seek Him, return His love.'

'Stay, stay with me, Mary. Then I will seek, I will love, what you seek and love.'

Mary's dying eyes filled with tenderness and compassion. Geraldine clung round her with a passionate vehemence, which was more than she could bear ; she mutely looked to Catherine for release. Catherine disengaged the child's arms and drew her away.

To Mr. Ormonde Mary repeated her desire to be undisturbed :

'Herbert,* you know,' she said, gently, 'sent away from him his dearest, that their grief might not discompose him. I don't mean quite away ; I don't mean that I will see them no more ; but, God will console them when I am gone—tell them that.'

Mr. Ormonde understood her wish, and represented the solemn necessity of attending to it. Mr. Faulkner soon arrived from London, and his presence at once sustained and controlled his wife. Mary perceived this, and her last act was to place her mother's hand in his. A death-like trance succeeded, from which she emerged from time to time, to the astonishment of those who watched beside her.

'Sweet sounds,' she murmured once, 'sweet sounds. Deborah ! is it you ?' And later, when they little thought that she would speak again, she whispered in Catherine's ear some words of the sixty-third Psalm, 'My soul thirsteth for Thee,' which Catherine took up, and concluded to her evident satisfaction. Then came a stillness which was the stillness of death.

* 'He looked up and saw his wife and nieces weeping extremely, and charged them if they loved him to withdraw into the next room, and there pray every one alone for him, for nothing but their lamentations could make his death uncomfortable. Their sighs and tears would not suffer them to make any reply, but they yielded him a sad obedience.' —WALTON'S *Life of Herbert*.

On the gravestone of Mary there were inscribed these words: 'They shall walk with Me in white.' Rev. iii. 4. And white roses and lilies were planted around.



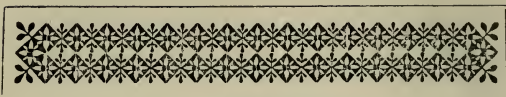


PART II.

Fra gl' inamanti cuori il cuor mio geme,
E impicciolisce, e sua virtù s' atterra ;
Fra i malignanti cuori il cuor mio freme,
E orgoglio oppone a orgoglio, e guerra a guerra:
Fra gli odii altrui l' anima mia è infeconda.
D'alti esempj d'amor, deh! la circonda!

SILVIO PELLICO.





CHAPTER I.

The widow's sorrow is not a storm, but a still rain.

FULLER.—*Holy State.*

IT was evening. In the sitting-room of a small house in Winchester, beside a cheerful fire, on an arm-chair drawn out to the length of a sofa, reclined a sickly-looking woman, dressed in mourning, which appeared less the token of recent bereavement than the habitual garment of a calm, abiding grief. Her face, though bearing the marks of suffering, was strongly expressive of undecayed energy. It was by one characteristic that her countenance impressed itself on memory. Those who thought of Mary Owen saw her looking on them with eyes beaming with intellect, or melting with tenderness, or fired with a certain lofty independence, or full of a mournful regret, a sort of long-looking into 'the days that are no more.' 'Tears, idle tears,' were indeed unknown to them, brightness there was, at times, painful to behold, fed, as it were, by an inward fire preying on the heart, which yet could not be quenched without the extinction of vital heat. They were open, sleepless looking eyes, and she would often press her hand on their lids, from a distressing sensation of overstraining there, and as if she would gladly close them. Wakeful nights were part of her malady, anxious days

were inevitably her lot. She was a widow, and the mother of fatherless children.

At a little distance from Mrs. Owen sat the boy and girl who looked to her as their only parent, the light of the lamp falling on them, as side by side they bent over the same volume. The boy was about fourteen, and the girl a year his junior. Neither of them had the rosy freshness of childhood, but rather the wanness of the student. The skin of Hugh was pale and delicate, and the only points that betokened health were the redness of his lips, and the clearness of his soft, slow, hazel eyes. His countenance was one of great refinement and of almost feminine beauty, owing to its gentle, thoughtful expression, and to the profusion of silky chesnut curls that hung round his brow. He was slight and tall of his age.

Gwen, on the contrary, was diminutive, wholly unlike her brother, and while bearing some resemblance to her mother, retained none of her beauty save the clear grey eye, with its sweeping black lashes. She was what you might call a formal, old child. Her figure had no lightness, no grace; her complexion no quickly varying hues; but of fire there was no lack in the glance with which she looked up suddenly from her book, exclaiming, with delight, and a tinge of pride also :

‘Mother, Hugh, I have done it! I understand it now, I am sure of it.’

‘I don’t,’ replied Hugh, with a groan.

The girl, placing her fingers on the volume of Euclid before them, went through the problem they had been trying to work with wonderful rapidity and accuracy, making all light to him that was dark before.

‘There!’ she said, looking with the utmost earnestness on Hugh’s face; ‘don’t you think I am right?’

‘To be sure you are! How stupid! I see it all now. My little Gwen, what a pity it is that you can’t

come into school with me to-morrow!' cried Hugh, patting her head approvingly.

His mother sighed, and made a slight impatient movement, something like that of a person who lifts a burden from one shoulder to the other for the sake of a little relief.

'Well, mother?' inquired Hugh.

'I was being silly enough to re-echo your words, my dear,' replied Mrs. Owen, laughing. 'I was actually saying to myself that it was a pity that Gwen could not be your schoolfellow in good earnest.'

'What, then, mother?' said Gwen, quitting her book to kneel beside her mother's chair, and fixing her eyes, which glowed just like the coals in the very heart of the fire, on her; 'you think you could do well without your little daughter—would like two great school-boys better? You have not really any value for those pretty lines of Joanna Baillie's which you showed me the other day, and which I learned, thinking you cared for them.'

'And I do care for them,' replied Mrs. Owen, amused by Gwen's eagerness, and distinguishing plainly the touch of tender reproach that thrilled through the playful tone. 'I do care for them, and especially for the sake of the excellent woman who wrote them.'

'Say them, Gwen!' cried Hugh, and Gwen began:

'But she of gentler nature, softer, dearer,
Of daily life the active, kindly cheerer,
With generous bosom, age or childhood shielding,
And in the storms of life, tho' moved, unyielding;
Strength in her gentleness, hope in her sorrow,
Whose darkest hours some rays of brightness borrow
From better days to come, whose meek devotion
Calms every wayward passion's wild commotion;
In want and suffering, soothing, useful, sprightly,
Bearing the press of evil hap so lightly,

Till evil's self seems its strong hold betraying
To the sweet witchery of such winsome playing ;
Bold from affection, if by nature fearful,
With varying brow, sad, tender, anxious, cheerful—
This is meet partner for the loftiest mind,
With crown or helmet graced—yea—this is womankind !*

But you don't look to find much of this in your Gwen. That is the reason why you can dispense with her so easily !

Her mother had gazed fondly on her while she was repeating these lines with enthusiasm, and now raised her hand to Gwen's brow to stroke back the somewhat stubborn locks, that she might look into the very depths of her eloquent eyes. At last she said, mournfully :

‘It will be very hard to do so.’

Gwen took sudden fright at these words. What could be their meaning? Apprehensions the most painful, though perfectly indefinite, passed through her mind. She was liable to these vivid impressions, and, in spite of remarkable self-command at times unable to control the effect of them. So now she exclaimed :

‘Mother, mother, why do you say that ! Why do you look so ? You have some meaning ? Oh ! tell me quick. Three times while we have been sitting there have you unfolded the letter you received this morning and read it. I thought you looked grave when first you laid it down, but you only said, ‘It is from Lascelles,’ when I asked you about it, and then I turned to other things, and remembered it no more till I saw you reading it over and over again—’ She spoke rapidly.

‘Gently, my dear Gwen, gently,’ said her mother, placing her hand on her shoulder. It was her custom to assist her child to subdue what she well knew must be brought into subjection.

‘Supposing that I have some meaning, I can

* Lady Griseld Baillie. *Metrical Legends*, by Joanna Baillie, 1821.

scarcely tell it if you ask thus.' Gwen was already quieter. 'Your observation is a true one—that letter is of importance. Now as I believe that your lessons are all right for to-morrow, if you will both bring your seats to the fire, you shall hear what it contains. You will have to consider it. I wish to consult you about it.'

This little appeal to consideration restored Gwen to even more than her usual sedateness. Poor child! She did not know the severity of the trial that awaited her. Her mother did full well, and therefore it was that she exacted calmness in the outset. Kind, gentle Hugh foresaw that there was some painful communication to be made through this letter, and felt so much for his mother and for Gwen that he forgot that he would probably have a share beyond that of sympathy in any sorrow that could befall them. Mrs. Owen placed and replaced herself and the lamp, and still did not seem to find a position or a light that enabled her to read comfortably. Her manner was slightly hurried and nervous.

'It is very kind,' she began. 'Diane always does write kindly. You shall hear what she says :

'DEAR MARY,—How much I wish that you and your two children could come to Lascelles for the Christmas holidays. It is almost strange that you have never done so before.' ('I don't remember that she asked it,' passed through Mrs. Owen's mind). 'But indeed you must come now—that is, unless you are really afraid of travelling in the cold weather. Of course, if to do so would quite be your death, I would not urge it ; but I think, if managed with care and prudence, it might be for your good, and I am sure it will benefit your children,—a change in everything, and my Geraldine will amuse them ; her spirits would divert any one ; I should like the cousins to know each other, dear Mary, as you and I used to know each other.

‘ Besides, this visit would be an admirable preliminary to a favourite scheme of mine, which, with your help, I hope to carry into effect ; greatly shall I be indebted to you if you enable me to do so. You know that my poor child has been alone since my angel Mary (your namesake) left us. I have felt much for Geraldine in this, and have done what I could to make amends to her for it. She has been almost always with me, and if I could not be to her all she needed in a companion, I am sure she has been a most charming one to me, and you know Mr. Faulkner is much away.

‘ But now people talk to me about my duty. How they tease and weary me ! My dear Mary, why can’t they leave it to my mother’s heart to find out that ? Do they suppose that they can love Geraldine as I do ? You know how you have always followed out your own system with your children, and you have every reason to be satisfied. But now people tell me (and Mr. Faulkner unfortunately listens to them) that Geraldine will be spoiled without the society of other children, and that, therefore, she ought to go to school, but that I won’t hear of !

‘ Now for my scheme. Why should not she and Gwen be companions ? Nature points them out as such. We were companions before them. They are nearly of an age. Spare your child to me for a little while, my dear friend. I know what I ask, but I think I can point out that there will be some advantages on her side also. At present her only companion is a schoolboy—(I beg dear Hugh’s pardon) ; and unless you quit Winchester, which for your son’s sake you cannot do, how can you afford your daughter the instruction befitting a girl ?—such an education as will enable you to carry out the design which I know you entertain, that she shall in future instruct others.

‘ You will yourself make her everything that is excellent and estimable. Hugh will render her a good scholar ; but accomplishments will be required which

I do not see her present means of attaining, and it is time to think of them. Let her come here, and share the tuition of Geraldine's masters, by which Geraldine herself will no doubt profit much more than hitherto, when she has a companion. Mdlle. Vernet is a first-rate French governess. A few years will complete the education of both these dear girls. Now do think this over, and consider how valuable a proof of regard you may bestow on your ever affectionate friend,

‘DIANE FAULKNER.’

‘P.S. Do not be annoyed at the little accompaniment to this letter, as if I (I ought to say we, for Mr. Faulkner is quite as anxious as I am to see you here,) were making too certain of your setting out on this journey. Even if you will stay at home, Gwen must start forthwith, and pay her cousin a visit.’

The accompaniment spoken of was a 10*l.* note. Mrs. Owen leant back in her chair; she had read with a tremulous voice, and now seemed somewhat exhausted. Gwen was even paler than usual, and her lips were firmly closed. Hugh looked from her to his mother, and then took his sister's hand. It was cold as ice; it invariably became so when her feelings were deeply stirred within her.

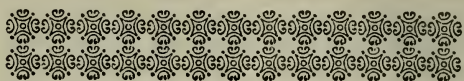
‘You don't mean to decide just yet, mother,’ he cried; ‘you talked of considering. There need not be any making up of minds to-night.’

‘To-night! no, my dear boy. We must indeed have a little time for reflection, though our decision must not be too long deferred, for Mrs. Faulkner, if Gwen do not accede to her proposal, will have to seek Geraldine's companion elsewhere. Supposing Gwen to comply, still her departure need not be for some weeks, because no doubt these coming Christmas holidays will be full of amusement to Geraldine, and her masters and her governess will probably be absent,—during that period Gwen would sooner remain here with us than join her, I know.’

Gwen replied nothing, but Hugh felt the nervous twitchings of the hand which he still held in his.

‘Now, Hugh, let us have your theme, your prize theme,’ said Mrs. Owen, turning the tide of the conversation into a course of much present interest and excitement to them all. And the revising and the criticising of Hugh’s production engaged them till the hour for sleep.





CHAPTER II.

This closeness did impair, and a little perish his understanding.

COLLIER.

G WEN slept in her mother's room in a little curtainless bed, near the window. Beyond was a small dressing closet to which Mrs. Owen always withdrew, that she might not disturb her sleeping child. This night as she moved to and fro in it, her eye was caught by some unusually light object in the corner which Gwen occupied. Pausing and looking steadily towards it, she perceived that it was the form of her child sitting upright in her bed. Mrs. Owen could not tell whether she had been startled in her sleep, or whether she was wakeful with anxiety. She hoped only the former, for the moment that she fixed her eye on her, she sank silently down again. Shading the candle with her hand, she took her usual last fond look as she passed to bed; Gwen's eyes were firmly closed, and her breathing inaudible; as Mrs. Owen turned away, one or two scalding tears forced themselves through her eyelids, but the child uttered not a sound, and her mother lay down in silence on a couch made restless by equal solicitude.

Unfortunately both the mother and the daughter had acquired habits of reserve towards each other, which originated in strong affection and self-forgetting devotion, but which were deeply injurious to the happiness, the welfare they most consulted. Each frequently

crushed inward those thoughts and feelings which she believed would harass and grieve the other, rigidly denying to herself the unspeakable relief of pouring out the whole heart, meeting the refreshment of sympathy, and attaining the conviction that at least there was no evil threatening, no grief molesting, no care corroding the one that the other was ignorant of. This secrecy was for years the mistake of their lives; but there was much that explained, or even seemed to justify it.

Gwen often said to herself: 'I must spare mamma. How feverish she looks to-day!'

Mrs. Owen often thought: 'My child is too young to be burdened with all my anxieties,—an unnatural load for childhood. She has too little freshness and mirth as it is; people think her a little old creature, I know.' Nevertheless it would surely have been far better for both, had Gwen been taken to her mother's arms on that sleepless night, and had they freely communicated to each other every sentiment which Mrs. Faulkner's letter had excited within them.

As it was, each lay in an enforced silence; the thoughts of the girl flitting through a fancied future, full of self-sacrifice, self-exertion, and unflinching purpose; those of the mother, the widow, painfully reviewing the past, and striving to bring stern experiences to bear on the future. The husband of Mary Owen had been the tutor in the family in which she had lived as a dependent orphan cousin. Some gave her compassion in her loneliness, and Hugh Owen affection. She loved and revered his noble virtues, his rare intellectual gifts; and now her loneliness was at an end—his heart, his mind were a world wide enough for her and full enough. At one time the family in which they resided made a continental tour in which Diane, then a girl, beautiful, idolized, soft, sympathetic, and generous, had accompanied them, and had lavished much kindness on her graver cousin, Mary. A British factory in one of the Italian cities proposed to Mr. Owen to remain among them to exer-

cise his clerical functions for their advantage, on what they considered an adequate remuneration. He thankfully accepted the offer, which brought to a close the patient waiting of years for a home he could call his own. He married; and not till he had passed some time in Italy, did he feel himself forced to recognise the fact that the climate had an alarmingly prejudicial effect on his health, and in a lesser measure on Mary's; one summer he exchanged his duty with a clergyman resident in England, and returned to his post invigorated and sanguine. During this period the Owens met with much kindness at Lascelles. The respite thus gained was far too short; another winter and another summer made terrible inroads on Mr. Owen's constitution. Then came a gloomy period of depression and abstraction, resulting in almost total silence. Mary's love and energy, the increasing interest of children, in whom every day brought something new to light, all failed to rouse him from the lethargy which enchained his faculties. He appeared like a victim to malaria; a low fever preyed on him. While change of air might have been efficacious, he had not believed it so indispensable to health, and even to existence, as to justify him in encountering the evils and difficulties by which he knew it must be purchased. He now felt like a doomed captive, and thought that Mary would soon be left to struggle alone. But, as soon as she became fully alive to her husband's danger, she urged his removal and accomplished it. One good result, at least, she obtained from the effort. In a more genial air—his native air of Barmouth—the load on Mr. Owen's spirits seemed lightened, and he was again almost what he had been in the earlier, happier days of their companionship. Strong intellect, deep religious principle, warm affections, all resumed their full exercise. He contemplated his wife's probable position, and prepared her for it to the best of his power; the few remaining months of his life were devoted to that end, and not in

vain. Mary bore up with the fortitude and generous forgetfulness of self which had always marked her character. She looked on his children, and was content to live to fulfil the directions which he gave her concerning them ; and after his death, her mind and heart seemed in almost closer communion with him than in life. She was a 'widow indeed.'

Mrs. Owen had friends, who led her to choose Winchester as her place of residence, in order to send her son to the college. Gwen, her little daughter, born among the mountains of Wales, in the home of her father's childhood, and named by the name most dear and familiar to that happy period, shared from the first her brother's education. Up to the age of twelve she learned everything that Hugh learned, and very little that girls usually learn. In music she showed a talent as yet uncultivated, but her mother hoped much from its development. Had it been in Mrs. Owen's power to place her daughter in a situation similar to that which she had once occupied, she knew its evils too well to have done so. Her hope and aim was to render Gwen capable of earning her own maintenance ; and with the accomplishment of this purpose her child mingled the fervent desire of ministering to her mother's comfort ; not quitting her, but working under her maternal roof, and enjoying in hours of rest the exquisite refreshment of her presence. 'A look, a tone will revive me when I flag or faint,' thought Gwen. Now these views were undoubtedly favoured by Mrs. Faulkner's proposal. Morning came ; Gwen rose as usual to be ready for the early prayers in the Cathedral, and undrew her mother's curtains to receive her kiss, for, in winter, Mrs. Owen could not be her companion. Gwen felt that she was drawn closer, held longer to her mother's heart than usual ; she could ill bear this, and disengaging herself, quitted the room, pulling down her thick gauze veil over her face, that no one might see the tears she was shedding. She walked rapidly through the streets, but it

was not the cold that quickened her step. There was something very unsympathising in their dry dull aspect, and in the few utterly indifferent faces that met her ; she knew that once within the solemn nave, she should no longer be overwhelmed as now by the sense of orphanhood and of homelessness that had come over her from the moment when she had lain down on her bed, with the thought of quitting her mother.

Gwen was on her knees in the quiet chapel in which the early service was said ; soothed by the chastened light that was streaming through the coloured eastern window—soothed above all by the well-known words that were falling on her attentive ear. Moreover, when she stood up to hear and to repeat the Psalms, it seemed as if her Heavenly Father were indeed thinking of her—especially of her—and sent the message of love to give her peculiar comfort. She felt that never had she prayed so earnestly : ‘ Then cried I unto Thee, O Lord, and gat me to my Lord right humbly.’—‘ Bow down Thine ear to me.’—‘ Be Thou also my Guide !’

‘ My time is in Thy hand !’ ‘ Ah ! yes, there it is, that is what I want, the support, the very assurance I need. All will go well. This is my staff—my way-faring staff—in this trust I can go forth.’

There was hope, even joy in the heart of Gwen, though the hot tears were blistering the open page of her little book ; when she left the chapel, she was quite calm, and returning home, entered the room where Hugh and his mother were sitting at breakfast, and with cheerful alacrity.

This was almost more than they had expected from her, or were quite equal to command in themselves ; for Hugh, on first coming down, and finding his mother alone, and disquiet on her brow,—the shadow, as it were, of a sleepless night, had spoken to her of Gwen, and it was only the sound of her steps on the stairs, that had broken a conversation of painful interest.

‘Mother, do you really think this is what it must come to?’ had been Hugh’s first words.

‘My dear boy,’ answered Mrs. Owen, ‘I shall leave the decision in Gwen’s own hands. I shall discuss the plan freely with her, but she shall decide for herself.’

‘How can you do without Gwen, mother?’

‘I always meant to do without her for a time; to send her to some school where she could have masters. But this plan is more advantageous than any I have been able to devise.’

‘Is it? Well, if you say that, of course Gwen will go. I assure you, mother, Gwen is wonderfully clever, more clever than most boys. Clavering says he never saw anything so surprising as her last verses. It seems a pity to take her from these good solid studies, and set her to girls’ work.’

‘That was just what I thought last night, Hugh, when you regretted that she could not go to school with you,’ said Mrs. Owen, smiling; ‘but then, you see, she is a girl, and will have to teach girls. I shall be very much surprised if she do not get on as well with music and drawing as she has with Latin and Euclid.’

‘What! you think she has a genius for them?’ cried Hugh, with pleasure.

‘I think she has talents that call for cultivation,’ replied Mrs. Owen, more calmly, ‘and the obstacles, opposed by poverty, may now be removed. But I hear her returning.’ And Gwen entered.

When Hugh was gone, Gwen, instead of going to her little table, and opening her books as usual for her morning lessons, placed a footstool before her mother’s arm-chair, and without looking at her, said:

‘Mother, sha’n’t we talk to each other a little, now?’

Mrs. Owen came to her seat, held out her hand, but did not speak. Gwen knelt down on the footstool, and then, raising her eyes to her mother’s face, said, in a tone of determination:

‘Mother, I know that I must go to Lascelles.’

‘My dear, there is much to consider before you say that.’

‘I considered all night—almost.’

‘What did you consider?’

‘Why, that this proposal opens the shortest and surest way to my learning all that I must learn before I can be of use to any one ; I shall be taught at Lascelles better than I ever hoped to be taught ; and, oh ! mother, I shall do my very best to learn !’

‘I don’t doubt that, Gwen, but you have more to consider yet ; not only what your cousin offers you, but also what she will expect from you in return. You will have a duty to do by Geraldine, and by her mother—have you thought what it will be, and if you can undertake it?’

Gwen was, for awhile, silent ; then said, tremulously :

‘What duty do you speak of, mother ? I am afraid that I have been considering nothing but how I could best fit myself for what I hope to accomplish ; all that I have been trying to brace myself for is separation from you.’

Mrs. Owen bent forward, and kissed her earnestly.

‘Not unlikely, my dearest child. Now let us think of something beyond this, more important, perhaps, though of less immediate interest to you. You are asked to be a companion to Geraldine, a girl of your own age, but of very different training. I believe that she is singularly beautiful, abounding in gifts which are likely to dazzle and captivate others, and to win flattery for her. My knowledge of her mother tells me what her indulgence at home must be. Now, can you meet her with the forbearance that a spoilt child requires ?—forbearance, I mean, of thought as well as word and deed. You have no experience in all this, Gwen ; you have been very little with other children.’

‘But, mother, if I am to teach them, to be their governess, all this is just what I want.’

‘And what a school would better afford you ; but then the expense of a good school is an almost insurmountable objection. It could only be met by some arrangement that you should be teacher after having been learner. Many trials would beset you there, no doubt.’

‘Everywhere, when once I leave you,’ replied Gwen, sighing. ‘I shall not like to be among strangers. It will make me feel shy and awkward. They will try me, and I shall try them perhaps ; for you see, mother, I don’t know what my temper may prove. I only know what it is with you and with Hugh.’

‘Ah ! my dear child, there is a trial which you will surely experience when you quit us, go where you will. To Hugh and to me you are necessarily important ; all that you do, or say, or suffer, has an interest for us. We aid your studies, we mark your progress. Now this never can be equalled among strangers.’

‘No, mother, no ; but I can think on the day when I shall return, and tell you and show you all I have done. I shall be working with you before my eyes all the while, and it will only be a longer waiting for Hugh than it is now, from the time he goes till he returns from school. Of course I shall feel the difference. It will be dull and dreary to what it is now.’ Gwen pressed her hands to her heart, and by an almost imperceptible motion to and fro, seemed trying to lull a pain she felt there. She presently began again to speak with some slight hesitation, but with an evident determination to make the avowal of what was passing within.

‘Do you know, mother, I have a pleasure apart from your sympathy, and from Hugh’s ; one I shall take with me—one I can’t help taking with me. I don’t know whether it is selfish, cold-hearted,—but I am afraid I sometimes forget everything else in it—yes—even your comfort, I have neglected for it, I know.’ Gwen

stopped short. 'I mean, the pleasure I take in my work for the work's sake. I am sure this is one of my temptations.'

'Perhaps it is, my child, and it will have more power over you when you are with those who have not so strong a hold on your affections as we have,' said Mrs. Owen, tenderly. 'Not so strong a claim on your love, —your pity.'

'Oh! mother,' cried Gwen, catching her hand. 'I am some little help to you now, and who will help you when I am gone?'

'I think I can manage for myself and for Hugh; there will not be too much for me to do, then,' replied Mrs. Owen, with a sad, sweet smile. Then changing the subject, she added: 'Gwen, my child, I must point out one thing: your simple home cannot give you the slightest idea of all the luxury and splendour that pervade the abode to which you are going, where the inmates fare sumptuously every day.'

'Ah! I shall never lie down at night without coveting my little corner of your room.'

'I dare say not; but I must not send you to this wealthy home without reminding you that there is a vow on you, to 'renounce the pomps and vanities of the world, and all covetous desires of the same;' so that my child must check all cravings for larger portions of earthly good for herself, and for those whom she loves more than herself. You must strive to raise your thoughts to higher, more enduring blessings, Gwen, if the slightest inclination to repine should manifest itself in your bosom.'

'Yes, mother,' said Gwen, in a low, deep voice, — 'counsel me further; tell me more of what I shall have to fear and to guard against.'

The mother and the child communed on deep and holy themes; their hearts burned within them, and gradually both sank into a silence, in which they seemed to understand each other's thoughts and meaning, with

more rather than with less distinctness than when they strove to clothe them with words.

Evening closed in, and Gwen and her mother, the occupations of the day suspended, were sitting gazing into the fire, the former raised her eyes suddenly, and exclaimed:

‘Mother, I shall like to see Geraldine; I shall like to see her if she is so wonderfully beautiful! I love to look on beauty!’ She sank again into silence, and presently added: ‘I know very well, mother, that I have no beauty—not the least—that I am quite plain; and I want you to tell me, do you think strangers would call me very ugly?’ The girl looked up with a nervous, sensitive expression.

‘Very ugly, my dear child!’ exclaimed Mrs. Owen, with a painful start. ‘How can any face that has intellect and feeling in it be that? I can easily suppose that strangers will bestow little notice on your person, Gwen, till they begin to regard with interest, to feel affection for, that which is within. You must be mindful that beauty be found there,’ she added, with an attempt at playfulness. ‘Remember the meaning of your dear little Welsh name, Gwen,—‘white.’ Remember that, my child! I have much love for it.’

And that night Gwen’s mother laid on her pillow while she slept, a copy of some of the verses in Holy Writ, in which whiteness is mentioned as the emblem of purity. One was: ‘Let thy garments be always white.’—Eccl. ix. Another: ‘Clothed in fine linen, white and clean.’—Rev. xix. The third: ‘And they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.’—Rev. iii. Mrs. Owen did not know that a portion of this last sentence was graven on the tomb of Mary Eustace.





CHAPTER III.

Ah ! très humble servante au bel esprit ; vous savez que ce n'est pas là que je vise.

MOLIERE.

‘**H**ERE, my dear Mdlle. Vernet, is my cousin, Mrs. Owen’s answer to our proposal that she should send her little daughter to share Geraldine’s education. Will you oblige me by reading it,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, passing a letter down the breakfast table to her French governess, whom she had begged to stay a few minutes in private with her. ‘I wish to hear your own impression of it.’ Mrs. Faulkner felt that this was the wisest thing to ask for ; she valued Mdlle. Vernet’s opinion, she wished to obtain it while quite unbiassed ; yet could scarcely refrain from declaring her own before the Frenchwoman had half deciphered the letter, and the moment that she regained possession of it, exclaimed :

‘I hope we are not going to have a complete little *précieuse*—not quite the sort of child I thought of. I don’t know how all this will suit Geraldine.’

‘Perfectly well, I have no doubt,’ replied Mdlle. Vernet, confidently and cordially. ‘*Mille pardons, madame*, for discountenancing your fears ; but I assure you this is exactly what Geraldine requires. She is growing insufferably idle and outrageously conceited ; and when a clever, well-taught child is brought into close comparison with her, she will begin to discover to her shame that she is totally ignorant of many things which the other knows as a mere matter of course. As to making any proficiency in accomplish-

ments, that she will never do, unless spurred on to exertion by the quickness and energy of a competitor. *Ce n'est pas qu'elle est bête.* She can learn—she can excel, if she please.'

'Nay, my dear Mdlle. Vernet,' observed Mrs. Faulkner, slightly provoked at this freedom of censure, 'you never must expect that poor Geraldine will work like Gwen Owen. The one must make it the object of her life to acquire a first-rate education, while the other—' Mrs. Faulkner stopped, a little ashamed to end the sentence exactly in accordance with her inward sentiments, which were :

'After all, what can learning or all the accomplishments in the world signify to a girl like Geraldine? Mdlle. Vernet and Lady Rivers are never tired of talking of her ignorance, poor child. I am sure I never knew half so much, and I did very well. She speaks French very nicely; she dances beautifully. I am certain she will sing, and that will teach her Italian. It is only that I may keep her at home that I listen to their sermons; just that Mr. Faulkner may not threaten a dreadful school again.'

Such were Mrs. Faulkner's thoughts, and Mdlle. Vernet was gifted with quite enough penetration to read and to reply to them.

'I am aware that a young lady of extraordinary beauty, possessing great natural powers of fascination, and occupying an advantageous position in society, may easily think that there is little need of study for one who has only to be seen to be admired and flattered on every side. *Mais vraiment, madame,* she owes it to you, to herself, to me, to make some exertion to do honour to the excellent education which she is receiving. Of course, I am speaking not merely of the services of so humble a person as myself. I include Mr. F—— and Signor G——;' and Mdlle. Vernet ran through a list of all the various instructors who made Geraldine groan, and finished: 'But, madame, allow me to repeat it, I have not the slightest

doubt that the very judicious step which you have taken will be crowned with complete success.'

Mdlle. Vernet rose, not desirous to prolong the conversation. The fact was that, being a remarkably clever, well informed teacher, she found a dull or lazy pupil an almost unendurable torment. She rejoiced in the prospect which Mrs. Owen's letter held out, that in Gwen's mind she should find a soil worth cultivation, and in the child herself a fellow-labourer. It was hard and thankless work with Geraldine, and Mdlle. Vernet often groaned over the task which she conscientiously strove to fulfil. There were too many recommendations to her situation at Lascelles to allow her to throw it up impatiently, though Geraldine almost provoked such an act. The delicacy and generosity of Mrs. Faulkner's disposition were qualities of peculiar value to a person discharging the office held by Mdlle. Vernet; and if she saw many reasons for remaining as long as she could remain, so Mrs. Faulkner saw many for retaining her as long as she would be retained. In her heart, Mrs. Faulkner did not think it a bad thing that Geraldine was so well matched in temper. She had never had so little trouble with any one as with Mdlle. Vernet; and though at first she had entertained a prejudice against her as selected by Lady Rivers, after some personal acquaintance she candidly allowed that she had great and solid merits. Though the Frenchwoman's language was often high flown and complimentary, there were *au fond* much honesty and honour in her character. She could never have endured the smallest deceit or concealment between a child and its parent. Her ideas of decorum were very strict, and her opinions on all points connected with it rather of the style of the *ancien régime* of France than of the greater freedom of modern English manners. Mdlle. Vernet, truthful herself, was by no means trustful of others; partly from long acquaintance with the world, partly from singular keenness of observation. She said that she had

the eye of a lynx, 'and that *pauvre* Mrs. Faulkner, she is as blind as a bat—so blind that if you force her into the light it only gives her pain, and she escapes back to the dusk again.'

On this clear-sightedness Mrs. Faulkner allowed herself to rely, saying, 'There can't be much amiss, or Mdlle. Vernet would have perceived it.' 'Mdlle. Vernet approves; I am sure no one else need blame.' She rejoiced to be saved the troublesome and, to her, odious task of detecting, checking, or punishing faults. 'I am very glad,' on the present occasion she repeated to herself, 'that Mdlle. Vernet is well pleased; I only hope Geraldine will be equally so. I could not have borne to have disappointed Mary Owen, as she sees promise in the plan for her orphan child.'

Reopening the letter, she began to read again those parts on which her misgivings had been chiefly founded. Her eye ran over the following passages:

'I may safely say that it is not a mother's partiality which leads me to pronounce Gwen's abilities to be of no common order. Hitherto she has shared her brother's education, and has had neither opportunities nor time for the acquirement of those branches of education to which I think girls are too much restricted. This may make her appear rather behind, than in advance of many of her own age; but to overcome the apparent disparity will be a spur to her efforts, and I hope it will soon be discovered that a solid foundation has been laid on which these lighter structures may be readily and rapidly erected. Indeed I anticipate that the attractions of music and painting will excite an enthusiasm which I should have been unwilling to kindle before her mind was in some degree strengthened by calmer studies.'

'Dear me, this quite frightens me,' and Mrs. Faulkner broke off, and glanced at another part of the letter.

'You must not, my dear Diane, expect to find a pretty plaything in my little plain girl. I will not, for her sake as well as for yours, suffer you to meet with

any surprise or disappointment here. I remember well your predilection for beauty, and in Geraldine you have told me it is fully gratified. I congratulate you, but pray don't let your eyes look for any such gratification from the sight of Gwen. She is destitute of anything commonly called beautiful. Yet I don't despair of your discovering gradually what I have often remarked with pleasure, certain gleams of intellect and of feeling which positively illumine at times a countenance otherwise formal and inanimate. My child is pale and diminutive, but there are moments when the heart and mind looking through her eyes, redeem her at once from insignificance.'

'Ah! I can understand all this better,' said Mrs. Faulkner. 'Come here,' she cried, to Catherine, who had entered; 'come here, and you shall read what Mrs. Owen says of Geraldine's future companion, and tell me if you think it will do. Mdlle. Vernet is charmed.'

Mrs. Faulkner watched Catherine's countenance as she read, but soon began talking herself, giving expression to her own ideas, and replies to those which she supposed were passing through Catherine's mind.

'Gwen has been brought up in a most peculiar way, I have no doubt. Dear Mary Owen is the best creature in the world, but she is so strict. I never could get on with her, because, you know, Catherine, everything like rigidity is terribly irksome to me.'

'Rigidity to an only child! it seems impossible.'

'Oh! but I don't mean that Mary has anything but the gentlest manner you can conceive, to every one. All her severity is for herself; but she has such a strict way of thinking, that one can't help feeling sure that she must really condemn more than half one does or says, though she is so kind all the while. She has a horror of everything that she calls self-indulgence. Now I believe that a child brought up in that way would be soured for life. I have quite opposite ideas. I am sure it would never have answered to have put a bit and bridle in Geraldine's mouth, and to have pulled

them incessantly, fretting her to death, ruining her temper. It would never do with a high mettle, and I would not subdue a noble spirit for the world. No; my principles of education are quite different.'

Catherine could not, would not, repress a smile.

'Now what do you mean, Catherine,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, colouring as she spoke as brightly as a girl of fifteen. 'Why should you smile?'

'But, ma'am, you are smiling, too.'

'Am I?' said Mrs. Faulkner, turning away her head. Then again looking Catherine in the face, she added, after a momentary hesitation, 'Can you believe it? I really am so silly—when first I read that letter, I felt more than half afraid of Gwen's coming, poor child!'

She laughed as if this were all a joke, but Catherine could see her secret discomfort, and Mrs. Faulkner could perceive that she saw it,—and stopping short, she said,

'Is not this nonsense? I think I can win a child's heart if I ask for it, Catherine?'

'I think so, indeed,' replied Catherine, warmly. 'It must be a cold heart that you could not touch,' was her inward thought; but Catherine, with all her fondness for her mistress, seldom proffered this sort of acknowledgment. Those whom she loved had some way of reading her genuine love and admiration, but it was without the use of words on her part. She scarcely ever assented to commendation when uttered by other lips, unknowingly testifying to the truth of those lines:

Therefore when others praise thee I am still,
For deeper thoughts than theirs my bosom fill.

She would speak in their justification when they were unduly or unjustly blamed, but even here she showed more abstinence than is common, natural penetration suggesting that a warm defence or a cutting rebuke will sometimes turn an idle talker into a vehement asserter, or even a confirmed enemy. That which now restrained Catherine from the full expression of

her feelings, was the conviction that her mistress's winning ways were a snare to her,—that she was too sure to please, to be as careful as Catherine would have had her be, that she was doing what was worthy of esteem. She had often felt the application of these words to Mrs. Faulkner's character: 'A fair-speaking tongue will increase kind greetings.'

Catherine was not alarmed at the account of Gwen any more than was Mdle. Vernet. She gave back the letter with a calmness which re-assured Mrs. Faulkner. Geraldine would have been excessively disappointed if Gwen had now been rejected. She was full of eagerness and excitement about this novel scheme. She framed many little plans in favour of the new comer which were very generous,—more generous perhaps than delicately considerate. She showed a wish to load her with presents, but all she said had a tone of patronage in it, and Catherine doubted how it might be if Gwen were not disposed to accept that which was proffered in such a spirit. Mr. Faulkner listened in silence when his wife told him that everything was charmingly arranged with Mary Owen. He only thought it was a pity that Lady Rivers could not have been consulted about it, but he did not express his regret, and Mrs. Faulkner could repeat to herself with hearty self-congratulation:

'Well, this is all my own doing; Lady Rivers made no suggestion here;—did not beg me to decide for myself, only she must say—must just point out—. No, I have arranged it all, and I am sure it will answer.'

It was now two years since Mary died. Her mother seldom reverted to that season of affliction. She had bewailed her child tenderly, but other causes, besides her own aversion to pain, had urged her not 'to refuse to be comforted.' It was sad for Mr. Faulkner to return evening after evening to a house darkened by habitual gloom.

'I owe it to Augustus, to my child, to myself, to everybody, to curb this grief, and struggle with my

too great sensibility. I know all this is true, though it is barbarous in Lady Rivers to place it before me in her hard way. And dear, good Catherine—she does not rightly understand me either—she does not see how necessary it is for me to have something to take me out of myself. I dare not brood over the past, as she would counsel.'

But however Mrs. Faulkner might impugn Catherine's judgment on some points, she would not, for a moment, hear of her quitting herself and Geraldine.

'Make your own terms, Catherine, but remain with us. You cannot, I am sure you cannot, justify it to yourself to refuse me.'

Catherine remained, but day by day her tongue found fewer occasions for uttering the name of Mary. Yet the last words of the sister she had loved rang long in Geraldine's ears. For awhile Catherine had but to raise a finger, and say 'Remember!' in order to still the wildest storm; but when the time came, as come it did, for this expedient to prove first weak and then powerless, Catherine resorted to it no more; to do so seemed a profanation of the girl's dear memory.

Any temporary amendment in Geraldine was destroyed by the increasing idolatry of her mother's love, now concentrated in her. The child's passion and caprice grew more and more intolerable, and Mrs. Faulkner could not, at length, turn a deaf ear to the complaints which met her on every side. Moreover, they reached other ears than hers, and she trembled for the consequences. She must devise some rapid plan of improvement, or she felt that the reins of government would be taken from her hands. She was at once perplexed and irritated.

'I see,' she said, 'there is quite a cabal formed against my poor child—organized by Lady Rivers probably; this is not her father's house, and she will be made to feel that, no doubt. But I am her mother, and no one shall tear her from the only bosom which

Nature bids to cherish her. I am not so spiritless as they think. The most cowardly creatures defend their offspring. I can rouse myself when I see those I love threatened. Unassisted, I have hit on a scheme that shall overthrow them all.'

All this energy and indignation were awakened by a proposal made by Mr. Faulkner, through Lady Rivers, to send Geraldine (now in her thirteenth year) to school ; and the result is to be found in the letter which Diane, without loss of time, addressed to her cousin, Mary Owen.

On the evening of the day on which the letter was despatched, Collinson, while engaged in dressing her mistress for a ball, repeatedly sighed deeply, gave her one thing when she asked for another, begged her pardon for making her repeat her words, and at last applied a handkerchief to her eyes.

'Why, is anything the matter with you, Collinson?' asked Mrs. Faulkner.

'Oh no, ma'am, nothing at all ; I beg your pardon, I am sure, ma'am.'

'But why should you beg my pardon? Are you ill? If so, pray go to bed. Catherine will sit up for me willingly.'

'Oh no, ma'am, thank you. I should be very sorry to leave any part of my duty for Mrs. Irving, or anybody to perform. I will sit up till you return. I am quite well, I assure you, ma'am ; only—I don't like to intrude my domestic feelings on you—a lady of so much heart, so very feeling—oh no, it is quite out of the question——'

'Now, Collinson, pray don't go on like this ; speak plainly, and tell me what distresses you.'

'My great responsibilities,' replied Mrs. Collinson, casting up her eyes and sighing—('One pin more if you please ; that bow has not the right set,)—great indeed ! an orphan child—not a whole orphan, but motherless, you know, ma'am.'

‘What? your brother’s daughter, whom you had here for a fortnight in the summer?’

‘Yes, ma’am, a sweet child—a very sweet child—and no one to look to but me.’

‘What do you mean?’ cried Mrs. Faulkner. ‘I never thought of any distress there? Surely your brother does very well?’

‘I mean, ma’am, no one to look to but me for a mother’s affection, and for anything you can call education. I am sure the pains I took last year with that child that she should not get into vulgar common ways, ma’am—and very teachable the girl is by nature, and really I doat on her something like you do on Miss Geraldine, if I may say so without offence, ma’am; I am sure I mean none.’

Collinson just remembered that Mrs. Faulkner had a decided objection to hear her affection for Geraldine compared to that of even any other parent for a child, and she hastened on with a little more embarrassment than she would otherwise have evinced, saying—

‘I have often thought, ma’am, that if the dear child were but nearer, she might in a manner be a companion and a comfort to Miss Geraldine, who would often enough be glad of a playfellow, and this would bring her under my own eye, and I should be less uneasy about her.’

It did not require more to make Mrs. Faulkner understand Collinson’s meaning. She saw plainly and quickly enough sometimes, and now she answered, with her invariable gentleness and good breeding—

‘Ah! yes, I see, Collinson; I quite see all that you mean. I am sure that it would be good for Miss Geraldine to have a companion; and I have invited a little cousin of ours to stay with her, to be educated with her in fact. It will suit them both, poor children, for Miss Owen, like my child, is an only daughter. Collinson, you must not vex yourself over your responsibilities; they are not those of a

parent. Can't your brother look out for some nice school for little Sarah? Inquire, and let me know something about it.'

Collinson stood aghast, scarcely recovering herself sufficiently to thank her mistress for these last kind words. Mrs. Faulkner turned as she left the room, saying—

'You can do just as you like about sitting up for me, Collinson;' adding, to herself, 'I don't want her to think I am angry, poor thing.'

'So, a poor cousin is to come, is she?' said Collinson, as she closed the door. 'A pretty chance she will have with Miss Geraldine! Sally's would have been better.'





CHAPTER IV.

Tout ce qui est sérieux lui paraît triste ; tout ce qui demande une attention suivie la fatigue.—FÉNÉLON.

‘ I WISH that we were not going to the ball to-night,’ said Geraldine, for the twentieth time, on the day on which Gwen Owen was expected at Lascelles.

‘Then why don’t you stay at home with me?’ asked Catherine.

‘No, I can’t do that,’ returned Geraldine, after a pause of astonishment ; ‘but I should like to see the first of this little Owen if it were another night. She begins by being troublesome, I see. Why could she not come yesterday?’

‘One day more at home was what she asked for, Miss Geraldine, and she won’t like to be called ‘this little Owen.’’

‘Well, what is her other short, odd name ? Gwen ! Gwen ! I don’t like that—it is very ugly, but not much trouble. Now, Catherine, you are not to show her a single thing belonging to me while I am away. Mind that !’

‘You need not fear,’ said Catherine, drily ; ‘the child will be much too tired to think of amusement to-night, and besides, I am afraid that her heart may be too too full of other things—’

‘Oh ! I hope she won’t be cross and crying, which you seem trying to prepare me for,’ exclaimed Geraldine ; and in a few moments she quite forgot Gwen in her delighted anticipation of her coming ball. She

must examine the white dress prepared for it, and the wreath of natural flowers for her hair. 'Certainly,' Mrs. Faulkner had acknowledged on its arrival, 'it has cost about twice as much to procure these blossoms, and to have them properly mounted, as the most beautiful artificial ones would have come to, but then I can't bear anything false for a child. These are fresh and lovely as Geraldine herself. Every one must allow that they are in much better taste.'

"Very pretty, ar'n't they?" cried Geraldine, peeping into the box at them. 'I must try them once again.'

'They will lose all their freshness if you do.'

'I don't care ; I will.' A camellia bud rolled on the floor. 'Never mind ; I don't !' cried Geraldine, as Catherine stooped to pick it up.

'Dear me, Miss Geraldine, you have on your white shoes already !'

'I know I have. I wish, dear Catherine, that you could see me dance to-night. Don't you ?'

'No, miss, I don't. I should be sorry to go out, and to let Miss Owen come, and no one but Ann to give her tea. Collinson is going to see you, you know. I have seen you dance times enough. There is nothing so very wonderful in it.'

'Oh ! yes, yes, there is. I don't believe Gwen will ever dance like I do. I don't believe any one can. You shall see me now.' And wild with spirits, she danced before Catherine like a fairy.

'Oh ! my wreath,' she exclaimed, and suddenly changed to the stately step of the minuet, which, child as she was, suited her better than the more rapid dance, and she hummed the music to herself as she went.

'You will be quite tired out before the evening,' was Catherine's only remark.

'So I shall,' replied Geraldine, quickly, and down on the floor she sank, Catherine snatching that moment to disengage the flowers from her hair.

In the evening, as Mrs. Faulkner went down stairs

to her carriage, she talked all the while to Catherine about Gwen.

‘The poor child will be wretchedly tired and frightened, I dare say, at the thought of seeing so many strangers. I am not sorry on her account that we are going out to-night. We can’t expect to make her happy at once; but to-morrow, my dear Geraldine, you must be as kind and as gentle as possible to her; and I must try—not to make her forget her mother—I don’t mean that—I should not like my child to forget me in the kindness of another—but still to turn to us for love and sympathy. Meanwhile, not one of us can do half so well by her to-night as you, my dear, good Catherine. A nurse’s arms are next to a mother’s! No one can reassure and comfort her as you can. Yes, I am quite satisfied that we are doing the kindest thing in the world by her.’

Geraldine sprang in after her mother, very well satisfied too, though with much less reasoning; and Catherine said to herself, ‘I believe it is just as well as it is.’

The sound of approaching wheels soon called Catherine back to the door; the carriage stopped, a little girl got out of it. She was much smaller than Catherine had expected, though she had been told that she was small of her age; and when she came into the light, her face was pale and her eyes red and swollen. Gwen had cried much on her journey, shedding all those tears which she had refused to allow to flow during her last day with her mother and Hugh. The sudden light half blinded her, and she stumbled on the steps of the house instead of running nimbly up them. She felt very shy and angry with herself for being so awkward, and her fall seemed an ill omen on arriving at her new abode. Catherine took her hand kindly, and led her up to the schoolroom. There was a cheerful fire, and tea prepared on a small table beside it. The boiling of a bright kettle was the only sound that greeted them. Gwen observed the vacancy

of the house as she passed through it with wonder, but was so bewildered that she neither heard nor understood what Catherine explained to her until she had repeated it all again. The governess was absent, and Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine were gone to a ball.

‘Gone to a ball!’ said Gwen.

‘A child’s ball partly,’ replied Catherine. ‘Miss Geraldine is very fond of dancing—are you?’

‘I don’t know,’ returned Gwen, shyly; ‘but I should like to see a ball very much. I shall like to hear Geraldine’s account of it to-morrow.’

‘I dare say she will amuse you. She always has plenty to tell when she comes home. But balls are no novelty to her; she has almost too many of them, especially this Christmas.’

‘Mrs. Faulkner will not return till late?’

‘Certainly not—not before one o’clock. Are you tired?’

‘I think I am.’

‘And hungry?’

‘No, not at all.’

‘You shiver; you are chilled.’

‘No,’ answered Gwen. She knew that her shivering was not from cold, but she concealed her nervousness, and thought to herself that she could scarcely tell whether she was glad to have escaped the meeting with so many strangers that night, or sorry not to have got it over.

Catherine contrived in a short time to make the child more comfortable, and they talked together with friendliness, except that Gwen occasionally relapsed into total silence. Catherine soon led the way to the little room prepared for her with a due attention to her comfort.

‘Thank you, I never want to be undressed or dressed, or anything of that sort,’ said Gwen, in reply to Catherine’s proffered services.

Catherine saw at a glance that the girl was scru-

pulously neat; her dark hair was very smooth, her plain dress in perfect order.

‘A queer little figure!’ thought Catherine. ‘I am afraid Miss Geraldine will laugh at her. Plenty of independence and determination, I will answer for it.’ And she wished Gwen good night.

The moment that the door closed Gwen knelt down and unlocked her box, forgetting her fatigue, thinking only that there were some things in it which she was resolved to look on before she lay down in bed, and to place where she could see them the first thing in the morning.

‘I sha’n’t feel so dreadfully lonely, then. Why did I say I would come here? Why did I pretend to be so brave, and there was no reality in it? Oh! if I were but at home again!’ She wept passionately. ‘Oh, mother! Oh, Hugh! You cannot hear me—you cannot see me! But that is fortunate. They are thinking about me—perhaps speaking of me—or not speaking, only because they can’t! They are sitting by the fire. Hugh has not lit mamma’s candle yet. They miss me. Poor Hugh! he has done many little things for mamma to-night that he has never done before, and many little things that I always did for him are left undone, and he tries to do as well without!’

By this time Gwen had arrived at her chief treasures. There was her Bible and Prayer-book, in plain, good binding—her father’s gift; and Ken’s *Manual of Devotion for the Use of the Winchester Scholars*, exactly the same as Hugh’s—her mother gave them each one. These must always be by her bedside. Then there was Hugh’s last present—a good print of Winchester Cathedral, in a neat frame; that must hang on the wall just opposite her bed. She would then see it the first thing in the morning, and it would bring with it the thoughts of the early service she had always gone to there—salutary, sus-

taining thoughts, though reminding her of present privation. She would say Ken's *Hymns* as she looked at it, and the memory of sweet music would float around her. While planning thus, she thought of the morning and evening hymns in a new book — her mother's last gift—which she had been reading during the day. 'I am sure I shall be very fond of it, but it is quite a new book as yet.' It was the first edition of *The Christian Year*. 'There is a nice shelf there for my books. I must just place two or three of them on it; it will give the room such a home look; and then I will go to bed.'

In a few minutes Gwen had arranged the half-dozen volumes which Hugh had selected for her that she might not forget her Latin, and having now worked off some of her excitement, she lay down and fell fast asleep.





CHAPTER V.

A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament.

WORDSWORTH.

AT two o'clock in the morning Geraldine sprang out of her carriage, not the least tired, not the least sleepy. 'How should she be when she had enjoyed the most delightful nap on mamma's shoulder, and that nice swan's-down cape round her the while?' The ball had been quite enchanting!

'And how do you like Gwen, Catherine? Of course she came? I never once thought about her the whole evening. How could I? But I must see her before I go to bed. I am resolved.'

'Nonsense! Miss Geraldine. What is there to see? The poor child is in bed and asleep long ago. She was quite tired, and she seems shy; you must not frighten her by your wildness.'

'I won't frighten her. I will go quietly, on tip-toe, stealing along, and no one can hear me in these thin shoes.'

'But the candle—you will throw the light exactly in her eyes, and startle her out of her sleep.'

'No, I won't; I will shade it with my hand; and Catherine, dear, you see I am resolved.'

So Geraldine flew up the stairs; and Catherine followed, and overtook her before she entered, for she was really employing great caution in turning the handle of the door. Nevertheless, when she reached the foot of the bed, in her eager curiosity she forgot

her promise about the candle, and let the light stream full down on Gwen's pale face and swollen eyelids.

'Mother!' escaped the lips of the child as she moved in restless distress. Geraldine did not heed the pathetic exclamation. She turned to Catherine, and cried, 'How ugly!' in a tone of disappointment and aversion. Gwen started up in her bed. Catherine caught Geraldine's arm and drew her forcibly back, closing the door. Gwen sank down again in darkness, and in a moment slept. When she awoke in the morning Catherine was standing by her, smiling:

'Well, you will get up refreshed. You have slept well, have you not? You will not be so tired as Miss Geraldine, after all!'

'Oh! yes,' said Gwen, 'I have slept, and dreamt too—such a pleasant dream! I thought I saw a young girl standing by my bed, with flowers in her hair—all in white—so lovely! I never saw any one half so lovely in reality, but in my dreams I think I have before now. She vanished in a moment when I was just going to speak to her, and I can hardly persuade myself that it was unreal even yet,' cried Gwen, starting up.

'It was no dream at all,' replied Catherine, laughing. 'It was Miss Geraldine in her ball-dress. She would come to look at you before she went to her own room. I scolded her for her nonsense. I thought it would disturb you.'

'Oh! I don't mind that,' said Gwen, quickly. 'Then it was really Geraldine?' And she began to get up with great alacrity.

'Why what a little active creature you are! When did you find time for all this unpacking?' asked Catherine, looking round the room with wonder.

'Oh! before I went to bed last night.'

A different reception met Catherine at Geraldine's bedside.

'I am so sleepy,' she said, yawning, 'I sha'n't get up to breakfast. I am sorry I went to look at Gwen

last night, because now I am not the least bit curious about her. Does she look any prettier this morning, Catherine? I am sure I shall never love her if daylight make no improvement in her.'

'Now really, Miss Geraldine, you have had quite enough of this nonsense. I cannot believe that you will be unkind to this fatherless child, just because you choose to call her ugly. If not a beauty, she can do much more than you can—dress and undress herself, and arrange her hair so neatly.'

'Dear me, Catherine; I should not like to do any of those things at all—not even to put on my own shoes.'

'More the pity, miss.'

'What an odd night-cap Gwen wears—not a bit of lace on it! I shall put her on one of mine, and see how she looks then.'

'Now, Miss Geraldine, are you going to pay any attention to what I have just said; or are you going to torment this poor child out of the house by your whims?'

'I hope not, Kitty,' cried Geraldine, jumping up and throwing her arms round Catherine's neck. 'I did form so many kind plans about her, and I can't bear that they should be all thrown away; and as to being ugly, mamma was saying yesterday evening, about Sophia Mundy, the ugliest girl in the room, 'every one would be handsome, if they could.' But don't you see, that if you let me tell you just what I think, I shan't be so likely to tell it to Gwen?'

'I don't know as to that,' replied Catherine.

Mrs. Faulkner was not much more charmed by Gwen's appearance than Geraldine had been; but the excessive kindness of her manner rendered it impossible for the little girl to detect this; and Gwen, whose imagination took quickly fire, was full of admiration and delight, as she watched in silence, without intentional evidence of either sentiment, every look, every movement of Mrs. Faulkner and

of Geraldine. Geraldine, though gratified by this quiet homage, soon needed something more to amuse her, especially on a day so languid as the day following a ball. When Gwen understood that her powers of entertainment were put into requisition, she shook off some of her shyness, and fulfilled the task very tolerably to Geraldine's satisfaction. The two children went out to play in the garden. Presently Geraldine returned, her cheeks scarlet, her eyes brimful of delight.

'How hot you are, my dear child,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, in alarm.

'Very,' said Geraldine, tossing her bonnet on the ground, and shaking back her hair.

'And no gloves!' exclaimed her mother.

'Oh! I suppose I have lost them in the garden.'

'I beg you will never take them off, Geraldine. Your hands—your beautiful hands!—Now tell me what you have been doing.'

Gwen came into the room quietly, and looking as demure as possible. Geraldine poured out an enthusiastic account of all that they had been about, ending with, 'I never had such fun before, mamma, never.'

'My dear Gwen,' said Mrs. Faulkner, after listening to the recital with some dismay, 'all your plays seem to me boys' plays.'

'Are they, ma'am?' said Gwen, with deference; 'I never had any but Hugh to play with.'

Thus, the holidays yet remaining promised to pass very merrily and happily. Geraldine wished that tiresome Mdlle. Vernet—those horrid Masters, were never coming back again. Gwen desired their arrival with all her heart. That Geraldine should have a play-fellow for a whole week and never once quarrel with her, was more than Catherine could hope, and the storm which she daily expected at last arrived. There was no important cause of dissension; but hearing their voices growing gradually louder and louder, Catherine approached as Geraldine exclaimed passionately—

‘I am beginning to find out that you are as ill-tempered as you are ugly.’

‘I am not ill-tempered,’ replied Gwen, casting aside all the rigid self-constraint which Catherine had already, at times, seen her practise. ‘I have been long enough with Hugh, and he never called me so, and I shall not believe it because you choose to say it.’

‘Believe it, then, because I say it,’ said Catherine, laying her hand on Gwen’s shoulder.

‘At this moment you have lost your temper. Take my advice, go away, and you will soon regain it.’

Gwen submitted, for Catherine’s language was calm though forcible, and her manner kind as well as firm. As soon as she was gone, Catherine turned to Geraldine—

‘Oh, Miss Geraldine, will nothing conquer your love of tyrannizing? Can you not feel how mean it is to exercise it over a child in the situation of your cousin?’

Geraldine sobbed, as much with sorrow as with anger. The children were reconciled before night, and this *first* quarrel was forgotten by both.





CHAPTER VI.

Il est vrai que la dame est un peu embarrassante de son naturel ; j'ai toujours eu pour elle une furieuse aversion.—MOLIÈRE.

GERALDINE was sitting at her mother's feet, resting her elbow in her lap.

'What do you think, mamma? Gwen says that brown frock which she has put on to-day because Lady Rivers is coming, is her best! Now, if I had not seen the gray one, I should have thought it must have been her worst.'

Geraldine spoke these words with the utmost disdain, and Mrs. Faulkner replied with as much reproof in her tone as she knew how to make it convey :

'My dear Geraldine! now I will tell you what we will do, instead of making such very ill-natured remarks—fetch me my writing-book, and a pen and ink, here to this table, and I will write a letter to Mrs. Owen about Gwen's dress. Don't you suppose she would like to have frocks just as pretty as yours, if she could?'

'I don't know, mamma; she pretends not, but I think that she would.'

'To be sure she would, and I have a scheme about it. Make haste. I want to write before Lady Rivers comes.'

Mrs. Faulkner quickly accomplished her letter, ran her eye over it, signed and sealed it before Lady Rivers arrived. It was as follows :

'I write in the full confidence that you will not hesitate to gratify a most reasonable wish, as you

shall hear. I particularly desire that while Gwen is under my roof the two girls should have everything alike; I am sure it will be much more judicious, much better for them in a moral point of view than making a difference between them. I thought of asking you before (but things go out of my head, I have such a wretched memory), just to let me dress Gwen, while she is with us, exactly as I dress Geraldine. You can't effect this at a distance, you know, and Gwen is too young to transact such important business, so you must leave it entirely to me. I am sure you will see the good sense of this plan.'

Now Lady Rivers is at the door. We have often heard of Lady Rivers; we have never seen her yet. Mr. Faulkner always speaks of her in the tone of one deeply impressed with admiration. 'My sister is as fine a woman as you can wish to see.'

To this Mrs. Faulkner almost inaudibly responds: 'I suppose she is handsome?'

'My dear, you ladies never think each other so.'

Catherine overhears this little colloquy, and says to herself: 'How Mr. Faulkner can look at my lady and think her beautiful, as I know that he does, and then turn to Lady Rivers and call her handsome, I cannot imagine. To my fancy, I never saw any one so stiff, so ungraceful, who does so little credit to all her rich clothes. And my dear mistress, on the contrary, every movement has a charm! and her smile—Lady Rivers can't smile—she looks harder than before.'

Geraldine cries when she catches the name: 'It is of no use to scold me for calling Lady Rivers that ugly, odious woman, for I always will,—when papa is not by!'

Nevertheless, Lady Rivers enters, as her brother pronounces her, a decidedly handsome woman. She was tall, ungraceful and ill-formed, although her head and throat were grand and Juno-like, affording an instance of a classical and magnificent style of features accom-

panied by a tone of mind and manners incorrigibly inelegant. Her countenance was harsh, certainly, and harsher with every succeeding year; her voice was unmelodious, her choice of dress remarkably injudicious. Gaudy, ill-assorted colours hurt the eye, and each fashion as it prevailed was adopted by her in its most exaggerated form; while her sister-in-law's exquisite taste preserved her from every extreme. With Lady Rivers came her twin daughters, Jemima and Agnes. They were about Geraldine's age. Jemima was an unattractive girl, rendered more so by the subjection in which her mother thought it right to hold her. By her system all expression of thought and feeling was checked; she did not train either; she dwarfed them.

As to poor Agnes, a cloud had rested on her intellect from her birth, through which it ever seemed to be struggling, like the pale moon through a mist, and always unsuccessfully. She appeared like one groping in the dusk, frightened on the smoothest and most familiar path. Her wan, troubled face, could not be seen without awakening feelings of interest; and if the mind were torpid, the heart was more than commonly susceptible. There was something so very affectionate, so very dependent, so very full of pathetic pleading in her looks and ways, that she touched all hearts, and attached some. Of the number of the last was Geraldine's. It was a singular and a moving sight to behold the fondness which existed between these two children. Geraldine felt herself irresistibly drawn towards Agnes by the bonds of pity, and Agnes' lustreless eyes had a liquid look of joy when Geraldine approached. No effort would Geraldine spare for her amusement. She would dance before her, sing to her, bestow pains on her such as were bestowed on nothing else, and exulted in having taught her many a little accomplishment which others had pronounced unattainable by her.

‘It is just because you think you can’t do it that

you can't,' would Geraldine say, striking the ground with her little impatient foot. 'Look at my fingers, now look at your own. Have you not as many? Are they not as long? Have they not the same joints as mine? yes: then they can do what mine can do, and must, Agnes, do you hear? I won't kiss you again till you have tried—no, not if it be till next week.'

And Geraldine's urgency prevailed in more points than could have been supposed possible.

'And now, Gwen, you must be very, very kind to Agnes,' was Geraldine's injunction that morning when Lady Rivers' note, promising a visit, arrived.

'I am sure you will,' said Catherine, taking an opportunity, when Geraldine was absent, to explain to Gwen what the state of Agnes really was. 'I do love to see Miss Geraldine with her,' she added. 'It is just one of the traits which prove how really good her heart is.'

Gwen was sent for to see Lady Rivers. The children were all constrained and silent in the presence of so formidable a person; but they were soon allowed to escape into the garden, and amuse themselves. Agnes, frightened at the sight of a stranger, would scarcely let go Geraldine's hand, which tried her patience, and she did not behave quite so admirably as Gwen had been led to expect.

Lady Rivers, as soon as the children were gone, passed a few comments on Gwen, and especially observed how sensibly Mrs. Owen dressed her girl, 'I mean for one who is to seek her livelihood.' Mrs. Faulkner thought of the letter lying beside her, blushed, felt guilty, but tried to appear not to have heard the remark. Every one was glad when Lady Rivers' carriage returned to the door. There was not one person at Lascelles who did not dislike her, except Mdle. Vernet, who always spoke of her as a woman of great judgment and discretion, and unfortunately this sole approver was absent. Mrs. Owen's answer to Diane's very pretty letter was prompt and simple. She said,

‘I cannot but feel the generosity and kindness of your proposal, but there are objections to the plan which strike me too forcibly to allow me to accede to it. I do not see that Geraldine could derive any lasting benefit from a system purely arbitrary, and at bottom fictitious. It cannot produce a real equality between her and Gwen on such matters as these. They are and must be unequal, and you can no more convince your child that she is no richer than that she is no handsomer than Gwen. Bring up Geraldine to know how to excel others in wealth and beauty. Teach her what her conduct and feelings ought to be to those inferior to her in both. As for Gwen, you ask me—as you will perceive if you reflect for a moment on the proposition made to satisfy the promptings of your kind heart—to consent to the formation of habits that would be unsuited to her mode of life, from the moment that she quits you. I must therefore beg you to leave me to replenish her wardrobe at the yearly visit which we have agreed that she is to pay to me.’

‘These very sensible people always plague and gainsay me in whatever I propose, Catherine,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, reading this letter to her. ‘But that one pink frock which I have already given the child, she must keep. Poor little thing! I know she liked it.’





CHAPTER VII.

Fast, fast the spirit clings
To the form of old beloved things ;
And deep and deep
The affections sleep
That waken to Nature's visitings.

Remains of W. S. WALKER.

MIDDLE. Vernet returned from her holidays to resume her labours with renewed vigour. She liked Gwen from the first; 'her eyes vouched for her abilities,' she said. It would not have been easy to have found a rival for Geraldine in beauty, so perhaps it was as well that point should be altogether out of the question. Besides, it was her mind which needed to be awakened, and urged to put forth its powers.

Middle. Vernet had resolved to employ the instrumentality of emulation, and to excite it to the highest degree that she could. Possibly she did not know those lines :

Her aim, when emulation misses,
She turns to envy, stings and hisses.

And the sense of them was as strange to her as the sound. She unscrupulously prepared to excite the stormy spirit of competition in a child already far too full of violent feelings, and in another with whose disposition she was perfectly unacquainted. Eager to try its power, she paused not to consider the danger. She never duly recognised, and therefore could not teach

her scholars, that there ought always to be a far higher and purer motive for the attainment of excellence than that of emulation.

‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.’

A genuine love, an unwearied contemplation of the highest excellence, the diligent observance of the apostolic injunction—‘Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things;’—surely may work far more than the petty striving to crawl an inch beyond some weak fellow-worm.

True, there is a mark set before us to aim at; but the space which we have to measure, with all the trepidation of hope and fear, is the distance from that mark, not the distance from each other; and small scope is there for exultation to him whose arrow has gone a yard beyond his brother’s, while both have fallen short of the aim. True, St. Paul urges us to run a race for a crown, but it is not to the spirit of competition that he appeals in order to incite us. Those promises of praise responding to our natural thirst for it, accorded to us in Holy Writ, do not foster or sanction the desire to outdo others, but minister to the honourable, glowing delight which the spirit feels in securing the approbation of those whom it most venerates. And what generous mind can meditate on the Apostle’s words without rejoicing that the Christian race is not exclusive as that of which he speaks, where ‘but one receiveth the prize?’

Fortunately, various causes combined to render Mdlle. Vernet’s experiment less perilous than from its own nature it might have been. There was stinging and hissing enough before long, certainly, but not so much from envy as other emotions. Geraldine was at once too proud and too generous to be prone to so base a

feeling. She had a strong conviction that, however glaring her deficiencies on this or that point might be, however great the shame to which her teachers occasionally put her, still, on the whole, there was something which placed her immeasurably above her competitor, and never felt really discomfited and abashed. Envy might possibly have effected an easier entrance into the heart of Gwen, but thence it was repelled with the horror which the first detection of its presence naturally excited, in one who kept that heart 'diligently.' Moreover, the progress which Gwen made was so rapid and commendable, that she had no temptation to envy on those points on which Mdlle. Vernet incessantly urged the girls forward. Geraldine was not in the least vexed to see Mdlle. Vernet and Gwen warm and steady friends; but she did feel, and gradually became disposed to resent, the guarded coldness which the latter, meaning to avoid altercation, day by day assumed towards herself; and found it the more displeasing because Mdlle. Vernet frequently affirmed that Miss Owen had *beaucoup de sensibilité* as well as *tous les talens*. One day a circumstance occurred which confirmed Mdlle. Vernet's assertion. The governess had selected for her pupils' French reading the beautifully-written little dramas of *L'Ami des Enfants*, assigning to each a part to be read in turn. Her choice one morning fell on the touching story of '*L'Ecole Militaire*,' and she naturally took the part of *Le Gouverneur* herself, giving to Geraldine that of *Le Directeur*, who seeks the first-named personage to describe and comment on the singular deportment of the new scholar, Edouard, and the curiosity and interest which he has awakened. When Geraldine read the words, '*Il est très ardent à l'étude, et rien ne peut le détourner de ses travaux*,' she turned to Gwen, and cried:

'Oh! Gwen, this is you exactly! you must certainly be Edouard. Let us see how it goes on.'

'*Mais dans les heures de relâche il est froid, sombre, et silencieux au milieu de ses camarades—*' '*Il s'élève*

contre eux comme un mur de glace.' Geraldine looked up mischievously, and added, 'Not so very unlike, either.'

Such an address as this made Gwen freeze the harder, and she read without expressing interest till she arrived at the confession which Edouard makes to *le gouverneur* of the poverty and the sufferings of his neglected family. When she had completed the sentences—'*Et l'on veut que je me réjouisse lorsque mon cœur est noyé dans les larmes. On veut que je mange un meilleur morceau que mon père n'en a mangé depuis treize ans*'—she burst into a flood of tears, all the more passionate for the restraint which she had imposed on herself to the last moment, and, darting out of the room, resumed her place at her lessons no more that morning.

'Ah! *je devine tout!*' was Mdlle. Vernet's exclamation, as she and Geraldine recovered from the consternation into which Gwen had thrown them. 'Have you not observed how she gives the preference to the driest bread and the plainest dish on the table, denying herself the sweets and the delicacies which children usually love so well? I see it all now!'

So did Geraldine, for she easily believed what touched her heart or fancy; and she repeated with much tenderness, to her mother, all that had occurred. Mrs. Faulkner was moved and surprised.

'But, my dear, I am sure Mary Owen is not in such miserable circumstances as your story speaks of. Mdlle. Vernet likes a little French exaggeration; you must not put such fancies into Gwen's head; she will hurt herself, and she looks like a little ghost now. I know what I will do. Catherine shall find out what truth there is in this.'

Gwen, when kindly questioned by Catherine, would say no more than that she could not help crying—certainly the story did make her think of her home, or rather made her feel that, had she been in Edouard's place, she could not have done otherwise than as he

did. But she had not practised any remarkable abstemiousness since her arrival at Lascelles; she was accustomed to plain fare only, but never had known restriction in that. She could not partake of the *bon-bons*, and preserves, and cakes which Geraldine was always eating; they undoubtedly would make her ill.

Gwen spoke the truth, and here the matter dropped.*

* I shall run the risk of inviting some of my readers to peruse, for the hundredth time, the touching anecdote annexed to the drama, *L'Ecole Militaire*, rather than that of leaving any destitute of the pleasure of seeing it for the first.

‘Un enfant de très bonne naissance, placé à l’école militaire, se contentait depuis plusieurs jours de la soupe et du pain sec avec de l’eau. Le gouverneur, averti de cette singularité, l’en reprit, attribuant cela à quelque excès de dévotion mal entendue. Le jeune enfant continuait toujours, sans découvrir son secret. M. P. D. instruit par le gouverneur de cette persévérance fit venir le jeune élève; et après lui avoir doucement représenté combien il était nécessaire d’éviter toute singularité, et de se conformer à l’usage de l’école, voyant qu’il ne s’expliquait point sur les motifs de sa conduite, fut contraint de le menacer, s’il ne se réformait, de le rendre à sa famille. Hélas, monsieur, dit alors l’enfant, vous voulez savoir la raison que j’ai d’agir comme je fais; la voici: dans la maison de mon père je mangeais du pain noir en petite quantité; nous n’avions souvent que de l’eau à y ajouter. Ici je mange de bonne soupe, le pain y est bon, blanc, à discrétion. Je trouve que je fais grande chère, je ne puis me résoudre à manger davantage, me souvenant de l’état de mon père et de ma mère.

‘M. P. D. et le gouverneur ne pouvaient retenir leurs larmes, en voyant la sensibilité et la fermeté de cet enfant. Monsieur, reprit M. P. D., si monsieur votre père a servi, n’a-t-il pas de pension? Non, répondit l’enfant. Pendant un an, il en a sollicité une: le défaut d’argent l’a contraint d’y renoncer, et il a mieux aimé languir que de faire des dettes à Versailles. Eh bien, dit M. P. D., si le fait est aussi prouvé qu’il paraît vrai dans votre

bouche, je vous promets de lui obtenir 500 livres de pension. Puisque vos parents sont si peu à leur aise, vraisemblablement il ne vous ont pas bien fourni le gousset; recevez pour vos menus-plaisirs ces trois louis que je vous présente de la part du roi; et quant à monsieur votre père, je lui enverrai d'avance les six mois de la pension que je suis assuré de lui obtenir. Monsieur, reprit l'enfant, comment pourrez-vous lui envoyer cet argent? Ne vous en inquiétez point, répondit M. P. D.; nous en trouverons le moyen. Ah! monsieur, repartit promptement l'enfant, puisque vous avez cette facilité, remettez-lui aussi les trois louis que vous venez de me donner. Ici j'ai de tout en abondance; cet argent me deviendrait inutile, et il fera grand bien à mon père pour ses autres enfans.—
L'Ami des Enfans, par Berquin.





CHAPTER VIII.

Pour bien peindre les gens vous êtes admirable.—MOLIÈRE.

MAMMA, I want you to take me out in the carriage,' said Geraldine. 'Gwen has established herself in the school-room this fine half-holiday, with her desk, and says she must write home to Hugh. I sha'n't move her, I can see. When I asked her again, she only looked more rigid; so I give her up, and come to you, dearest mother. You always can and will amuse me.'

'Very well, my child,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, glad to have Geraldine, and a little jealous of Gwen's having won her away lately. 'We will amuse each other.'

Now let us see how the frigid-looking Gwen is amusing herself; quite as well as Geraldine, we should think, when we take a look at her. The weather was bright and frosty, and she was sitting beside a cheerful fire, the blaze of which, reflecting itself on her cheek, relieved it from its usual pallid hue. Her pen was flying rapidly over her paper. Every now and then a smile curled her lip and brightened her eyes; she paused to contemplate her ideas with complacency, and then hastened to commit them to writing. When her letter was completed she got up and stood over the fire, reading it through again. She had indulged herself in detailing to Hugh all the pent-up secrets of her heart, telling him everything, and all that she thought of every one with whom she had made any acquaintance since she had seen him.

'It is to me like sitting at a play, and I am better

pleased to listen than to talk. Everything is to me a complete change from mamma's quiet little room, and my Winchester studies, and my games with you. Can you believe it? both these last have made me rather an object of alarm here. I don't think any of them like me as well as if I could not construe Latin. Mrs. Faulkner is frightened at my skill in jumping, but Geraldine has plenty of life and fun naturally, and enjoys it. I am sure I sha'n't learn to wish to be a fine lady. I should be sorry to lie on the sofa all day, like Mrs. Faulkner, ringing the bell for something to do, and changing her dress half a dozen times, for the same reason, I imagine. Her maid is as fine a lady as herself. Our French governess is a very clever woman—a Parisian—horried at my pronunciation, but I hope I shall soon improve it. Geraldine, who has been so long with her, out of pure laziness talks very often the most wretched stuff for French that you ever heard. Yesterday, when Mdlle. Vernet called out, '*Qui est là ?*' she answered '*Je ;*' but of course she knows better. She reminds me much of those verses which we have often laughed at :

Ma fille,
Mabille,
S'habille,
Babille,
Se déshabille.

I don't love any one here so well as Catherine Irving. I don't know what to call her; she used to be the nurse. There is an excellent English library, of which I believe that she has made more use than anybody. I hope I shall have many a pleasant hour in it—my pleasantest. Oh Hugh! if I could by a wish bring you there! Mr. Faulkner comes down from London every evening, but really he is so silent and grave that I wonder sometimes what makes him come so far. Every one seems afraid to speak in his presence.

Geraldine stands in awe of him, and of no one else. He brings Mrs. Faulkner a number of pretty presents, and she is just like a child with them; it is amusing to see and to hear her; only you would think her very silly if I repeated some of the things that she says. Sometimes I am fond of her, and like to listen to her. At first I thought I could never tire of looking at her and at Geraldine, they are so beautiful; but I am beginning to be glad to turn occasionally to Catherine's sensible, good-tempered face, or to Mdlle. Vernet's ugly, clever, ill-tempered one instead.

'Lady Rivers, Mr. Faulkner's sister, also comes here, very fine, very proud. I don't think she is at all like a lady: she takes notice of me to humble Geraldine, but we neither of us care for that. Mrs. Faulkner and her daughter are both generous. I wish, with all my heart, they would give me fewer presents. There is something about presents that I hate; they make me think of the Roman girl, who was crushed to death by the soldiers' glittering shields. I know there is no sense in this comparison, but it comes into my head. Certainly, I do feel oppressed by favours, followed by treatment that I don't like: that is the truth of it. Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine gall me (the one intentionally, the other not), for Geraldine wants to tyrannize over me, and Mrs. Faulkner evidently thinks I am to be pitied, and I find it easier to put down Geraldine's impertinence than to bear this compassion.'

This is enough to show the pervading tone of Gwen's letter. It must be added, that she had already, in writing to her mother, commented on all that gave her scope for praise and gratitude.

Gwen folded her letter and sealed it; the next thing was to take it down to the letter-box. As she turned to leave the room there flashed across her mind an instance of generous consideration on the part of Mrs. Faulkner, that she could not think of

without being touched by it. The first time that Mrs. Faulkner saw a letter to her lying on the table, she said : 'Gwen, you don't know the rule of the house ; Aldridge always pays the postage of every letter that goes from it. Now—don't say one word—it is the rule, and do you think it can be broken for a little thing like you ? certainly not.'

'It is this liberality,' thought Gwen, 'which gives me the power of writing to my home so freely and so frequently as I have done, and can it be right, in the very letters she sends for me, to comment in this way on her and on her child ?—to detail every folly, fault, or weakness, witnessed by me, because I have been taken into the bosom of her family ? Am I beginning an honourable course ? this is the first step I have taken in it, and I can still go back.'

Gwen returned to the fire, and put her letter, which she had spent the whole of the fine afternoon in writing, into it. She chose rather a black spot to place it in, not absolutely certain that she would burn it after all ; therefore, she avoided the heart of the fire, and she stood still and watched it gradually blacken, curl, and shrivel till the sealing wax, getting thoroughly hot, broke into a blaze. The deed was done, not expeditiously, but effectually. As Gwen stood looking with satisfaction as well as regret, on the white ashes, Geraldine ran up stairs and into the room, crying :

'Well, Gwen, have you finished your letter ?'

'Yes,' replied Gwen, drily.

'Where is it ? you don't mean to say that you have burnt it ?' Geraldine's quick eye fell on the ashes.

'I don't mean to say anything,' replied Gwen, turning away. 'I mean to go out for a run.' She knew it was too late to write another letter.

'Well, you are odd !' exclaimed Geraldine. 'Wait, I am coming too.'

As the girls were crossing the hall they met Mrs. Faulkner, who asked :

'Have you put your letter into the box, Gwen ?'

Gwen's cheek flushed a little, partly because she knew that Geraldine was waiting for her answer.

'No, ma'am,' she said, distinctly.

'What! could you not finish it in time?' remarked Mrs. Faulkner, with surprise.

'Oh! mamma, I really believe that what she had been writing all the day she put at last into the fire! Now do, Gwen, just speak the truth—it is so curious.'

'The truth!' repeated Gwen, proudly; 'I have spoken the truth.' And she walked up the stairs to fetch her bonnet.

'What a little disagreeable thing it is!' cried Geraldine. 'But she can be pleasant enough when she chooses. She amuses me more than any one, sometimes.'

And Gwen did choose to be very amusing that evening, though she could not consent to be always at Geraldine's call, just when she would have her. There were times when Gwen wished to amuse herself. She, too, was an only child, and though not indulged with the same indiscriminate, foolish fondness lavished on Geraldine, she had been too much an object of tender consideration to be able to forget herself at all times for others without an effort. Then, again, the lively interest which her mind took in its pursuits would not allow her to break away as Geraldine did, fluttering like a butterfly from flower to flower. Gwen, like the bee, would stay till she had extracted the honey, and, moreover, would often not be satisfied without going straight home to the cell to store it away. These are old similes, but very true as applied to these children.





CHAPTER IX.

If 'tis not to be had at home,
She'll travel for a martyrdom.

CRASHAW.

ANOTHER fine half-holiday arrived, on which, though Gwen acknowledged that she had no letters to write home, Geraldine found that she could not draw her out of the library by any means that she could employ. She had sought her everywhere, and at last found her sitting on the floor, with a book in her lap, and a pencil and paper, which she pushed out of sight.

'Gwen, Gwen, how I have hunted for you! Now do come out.'

'Not now, Geraldine; indeed I can't. I want very much to read a little of this book.'

'Why what is it? Oh! that Fleury which Mdlle. Vernet wanted, and made me nearly break my neck in scrambling for. It is a book that no one cares for but herself. Do let it alone, and come with me.'

'No one cares for!' replied Gwen, her eyes darkening in their own peculiar way with enthusiasm. 'I care so much. I read a bit when she made you reach it down, and I resolved to read some more the first minute I could, and that is now.'

'Well, it is very selfish.'

'But, Geraldine, how is it more selfish in me to stay here when I have begun reading, than in you to wish me to come away?'

‘Oh! because the half-holidays are given on purpose for you to play with me.’

But Geraldine went away, thinking that if she got Gwen out against her will, she might not prove an agreeable companion, and Gwen called after her, with a touch of compunction : ‘I’ll come presently.’

Geraldine departed ; Gwen pulled out her pencil and paper again, and with her book before her, open at a narrative which had struck her imagination powerfully, she wrote on and on, sometimes very rapidly and continuously, sometimes pausing and reflecting. The occupation interested her so much, that she did not observe that the whole day had passed since she said, ‘I’ll come presently,’ nor did she hear Geraldine steal into the room and come behind her ; suddenly she felt two hands on her shoulders, and heard a cry :

‘Verses, I declare. Then I will read them ; that is but fair. As you have done nothing else to make my time pass pleasantly, you shall at any rate give me your verses to amuse me.’

‘No, no, Geraldine, they are not amusing—I dare say they are very bad—I am quite sure that you will not like them.’

‘Let me judge of that. I feel curious to see them.’

‘You can’t make them out ; I can’t myself. I have scribbled them so fast—’

‘You have been here several hours, I am sure.’

‘Have I? but that is not long, for I have finished ; at least, I know I must alter and put a great deal right—and there are places to fill up.’

‘Come, come, Gwen ; is it a story? Let me hear it. I’ll sit here where I can look out of the window if I find it dull.’

Gwen longed to hear the *sound* of the verse, and she did not know to whom she could read it. Of Mdlle. Vernet she felt afraid ; Catherine she had thought of, but Geraldine insisted, and she began. She gave a brief explanation, reading the following sentences in Fleury :

EULALIA.—A SKETCH.*

'A.D. 303. A Mérida, capitale de Lusitanie, Eulalie, vierge de famille noble, souffrit le martyre, âgée seulement de douze ans. Dès l'enfance elle avait montré une gravité au-dessus de son âge. Elle montrait aussi une telle ardeur pour le martyre que ses parens la tenaient cachée loin de la ville dans une maison de campagne. Mais elle s'échappa la nuit toute seule.—FLEURY, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, livre 8me, xlvii., *Martyres d'Espagne*.

'But the verses,' cried Geraldine; 'the verses!'
'They begin here,' said Gwen.

'A child at eve through orange-gardens strayed,
A strange and untold grief upon her preyed.
From Merida her anxious parents fled
When Christian blood remorseless tyrants shed;
For much they feared their child would seek to share
The martyr's pangs, and would her faith declare;
Not by compulsion, but in wild defiance
Of all that man can do, and firm reliance
That none are blest as they who 'do not love
Their life to death,' but seek their joys above.
'Twere vain to argue with a maid whose breast
Enthusiasm from infancy possessed.
They fled the city, sought the rural home,
Where for twelve summers 'twas her wont to roam,
There hoped the cooler breeze, the flowers' perfumes,
The songs of birds, the fever that consumes
Her fragile frame will calm—her mind engage
With milder fancies, fitting more her age.
Eulalia guessed their aim, and inward crushed
The appeal of passion, to her lips that rushed;
Confirmed in purpose grew; no watchful power
Shall long withhold her from the wished-for hour.

* These verses were composed before the writer had met with *Prudentius*.

'I cannot linger in these gloomy shades
Where many a Christian ghost my peace invades ;
I hear their sighs oft whispered 'mid the trees,
I hear their shrieks oft borne upon the breeze,
The waterfall repeats the martyr's name—
They all invoke me—all upbraid with shame !
I will not tarry where I dare not tell
My firm design—the martyr-list to swell.
Why did they bring me here ? 'twas easier far
In Merida to plunge me in the war—
The idol's temple to profane—o'erthrow
The senseless image, and my life forego ;
Their heathen fears with biting words to grieve,
And boldly to avow all I believe—
My brother scaled last year that wall of stone,
And found his way to Merida alone ;
To reach the Circus—that was all he sought,
Where men with beasts for men's diversion fought.
Oh ! I would mingle in more glorious strife ;
And shall they force me to preserve my life ?
When it hath been my earliest treasured hope
With Christ's assailants front to front to cope.
In daily musings—dreams that came again—
I have replied to questions of stern men,
Have still maintained the truth, and seen their eyes
Glare on me fiercely—marked their fury rise,
Scoffed at their menaces, and heard them give
The final doom—' No longer shall she live !'
And is this but an idle dream—no more ?
And shall it pass and leave me as before ?
The longed-for struggle shall I never meet,
To die in flames, wake at my Saviour's feet ?
The palm may ne'er again so near me wave,
And ne'er beneath me yawn the martyr's grave—
Oh, how unkind the friends who seek to save !
Now, if I 'scape, I may not bid adieu,
False to their bidding, but to somewhat true
That whispers in my breast, ' Eulalia, fly ;
Haste, Christian maid, to Merida, to die.'

‘Oh, no, no!’ cried Geraldine; ‘don’t let her!’

‘She must,’ answered Gwen, in a tone of deep determination.

‘The day hath passed in weak regrets; ’tis night,
The stars are out, the moon serenely bright—
She smiles upon my path, she cheers me on.
Dare I still doubt? ’tis time that I were gone—
Down the lime avenue I’ll fleetly pass,
And none will hear my foot-fall on the grass;
Farewell, dear pleasant home, thy silent courts
Shall never more re-echo to my sports.
Dear parents, e’en in thought I dare not greet
You now. Forgive your child her sole deceit.
When first you miss me, what will be your fears,
Your grief, when first my death shall meet your ears!
’Twere cruel and vain to bid you not to mourn,
But, oh, may God to joy your mourning turn!
Wipe from your pallid cheeks your tears away,
And ye shall henceforth as my natal day
Observe my day of death, exult to claim,
Writ in the martyrs’ list, Eulalia’s name!’

‘You know, Geraldine, the early Christians did keep the martyrs’ day of death as their birth-day; was not that beautiful and true?’

‘I scarcely can discern, with streaming eyes,
The lofty towers of Merida arise;
And scarce will bear me on my bleeding feet—
How lag the steps that, starting, were so fleet!
The goal’s in sight—the race is nearly run,
I’ll reach the city with the rising sun;
The Sun of Righteousness, with power to heal!
That thought forbids me fleshly pangs to feel.
My heart beats high with hope. Ye feverish throbs
Rack not my brain—and cease, convulsive sobs!
In this cool stream my weary limbs I’ll lave,
And of the passer-by a morsel crave;

Then fresh and blithe as morning breeze, the gate
Entering, will challenge my desired fate !'

'The child hath gained the portal, and hath passed,
And some a curious look upon her cast,
And some in pity stopt, and deemed it strange
A child so gentle thus was left to range ;
For they could read her birth and breeding high,
Despite her way-soiled garb, torn feet, and haggard eye.
But, if the maiden's looks amazement woke,
Yet stranger seemed her questions when she spoke.
'Oh, tell me where the judgment-hall, I pray,
And sit the judges there from break of day ?'
'Ay, little one, and toil, I wot, till eve,
Yet many a Christian unchastised leave ;
In yonder stately hall their councils meet.'
On sprang Eulalia, with untired feet.
'Nay, do not thrust me back, I have words to speak
Will dearly please your judge, whose face I seek.
I am a feeble child—I know it well,
And yet a weighty secret have to tell.'
'Pass on,' the surly sentinel replied ;
Eulalia stood before the judge, and cried—
'You search for Christians ; take me, I am one—
I hate your idols, and their altars shun ;
I mock their worshippers, e'en Cæsar too,
If he to senseless wood and stone can sue.'
'Whence is this maid—who let her here intrude ?
From Christians she hath learnt this language rude.
Go home, fair child, and tell them they're to blame
To make thy tongue the vehicle of shame.'
'I am untutored, and by none am sent ;
Unseen I left my home, my steps here bent,
To seek the baptism stern of blood I come,
And will not quit you till you seal my doom.
Why this unwonted pity ? you have slain
Many as young and tender ; some in vain
Have asked compassion. You perchance refuse
To grant me death, because 'tis death I choose !

Cannot your eyes in torments still delight ?
You are not, surely, weary of the sight ?
I'll not believe that I arrive too late,
And supplicate in vain a Christian's fate.'
A priest passed by, who bore the sacred flour
To sacrifice ; she cast it in a shower
Upon the earth, and cried, with scornful smile—
'See how I make your holy things most vile !'
'Bear her to instant death,' the judges cry ;
The executioners are ever nigh ;
They seize the maid ; her sudden ire is o'er—
Not an invective, not a struggle more ;
A heavenly mildness settles on her face,
She has subsided into maiden grace ;
Her slender hands she folds upon her breast,
And kneels as one who prays ere taking rest.
The savages have scourged her—not a cry
Has passed her lips—their taunts gain no reply.
With stripes of gore is laced her skin of snow—
'By this inscription men my faith may know,'
She meekly said. They lighted torches bear,
And quickly scorch the locks of raven hair
That fell about her like a glistening veil ;
In suffocating smoke her breathings fail.
Then drooped her youthful head upon her breast ;
Vain are their torments—she is with the blest.
Some saw a snow-white dove that pierced the skies,
And some affirm thus martyrs' spirits rise !

'They left the corpse in scorn upon the ground,
But burial meet for virgin soon it found :
Fast fell the flaky snow ; the beauteous maid
In shroud of glittering whiteness was arrayed ;
And soon a sepulchre above her rose,
And hid her from the gaze of mocking foes.'

Gwen stopped, and Geraldine burst into tears. Gwen threw her papers hastily on one side, and embraced her, partly gratified by seeing the effect of her verses, partly

moved to more affection towards her by the sight of this sensibility than she had ever felt before. While she was trying to soothe her, Catherine came in:

‘What is this?’ she said, but she quickly perceived that it was no quarrel.

‘It is all Gwen’s verses,’ cried Geraldine, somewhat like a child who is angry at the pain occasioned it by an object which nevertheless attracts it. ‘They are so dreadful. But, Catherine, you must hear them too, and then you will cry, I know.’ And Geraldine sobbed afresh.

‘Come, let me see them, may I?’ asked Catherine.

‘Oh! no, you can’t. I must copy them before any one can read them but myself.’

‘When were they written?’

‘Just now,’ said Geraldine, ‘while I was out at play; only think!’ and she insisted that Catherine should hear them, and that Gwen should read them over again.

Catherine listened with interest enough to satisfy Geraldine, and to show Gwen that the tone of feeling which had led to the composition of them was understood by her.

Evening was closing in. The two girls were still sitting beside Catherine,—Gwen holding one of her hands, and by her tight pressure of it, evidencing without words her emotion;—Geraldine’s head lying on her lap, her long golden hair streaming over it, and Catherine’s other hand intertwined with fond affection in the bright and beautiful curls. The child suddenly shook them back, and raising her head, gazed earnestly in Catherine’s face, saying:

‘Have there indeed been those who have died like this?—so young—so brave? Oh! Catherine! Do you think Mary could have done so?’

Catherine paused. She answered, with deliberation, ‘I don’t think that the tale is like Mary. She would have stayed in the home to which her parents had conveyed her, enduring the privation they imposed, with just such patience as that with which she used to en-

dure her sickness! and in thus doing, she would have done better than Eulalia.'

'Better!' exclaimed both girls at once.

'Certainly that which was more difficult; it would have cost Eulalia more to stay than it did to go,' replied Catherine.

'Yes,' said Gwen, 'because it would have done violence to her highest feelings. Of course she felt satisfaction in following whither they led her!'

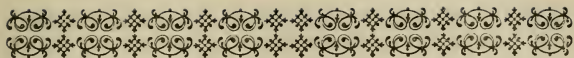
'True; but if she had recognised that God, by subjecting her to her parents' authority, did not at that time require the sacrifice which she could offer Him with so much joy, but rather one which cost her dear—dearer than her life—I mean the foregoing of the martyr's palm, and a share in the fate of those whose faith she shared, and whose afflictions she coveted: would there have been no satisfaction in acquiescing?'

'Yes,' said Gwen, in a low voice, and she looked down thoughtfully.

'Oh!' cried Geraldine, 'I wish her parents had never run away from Merida in the beginning, and then they might have died together!'

Geraldine was not slow in communicating Gwen's work to her mother. Mrs. Faulkner thought that whether the verses were good or bad, it was very clever of Gwen to write them. She was no judge of poetry, she knew, but she did wish that Gwen would not choose such painful subjects any more. She could not help crying; who could? She did not like such ideas to be put into Geraldine's head; to be sure she could not carry them into execution now. 'I should have thought it my first duty to fly, and to take her with me under such horrible circumstances. It is not the least use to talk to me of anything else.'





CHAPTER X.

Una medesima lingua pria mi morse,
Si che mi tinse l'una e l'altra guancia,
E poi la medicina mi riporse.

DANTE.

THE time came when Geraldine ceased to find amusement in Gwen as in a new toy. She grew tired of her, and often called her prim and conceited. Mdlle. Vernet, who was a clever woman rather than one of sound judgment, and certainly not possessed of a good temper, quite overshot her mark as far as Geraldine's improvement was designed, by setting up Gwen in comparison to her on all occasions, and lauding her as being much more '*sage*,'—much more 'clever and industrious.'

'One and all, no doubt!' exclaimed Geraldine, mimicking Mdlle. Vernet's tone admirably, for the gratification of Collinson, whose society she sometimes selected in preference to that of her governess or her cousin. 'One and all, no doubt; nevertheless there is an accomplishment in which I defy her to surpass me—the art of plaguing. How mad I can make Mademoiselle! and as to Gwen herself, never have I had maid or teacher whom I could torment as I do her; and by such little things—mere trifles, that would not discompose me in the least. I see her growing more and more frigid, just because within she is getting hotter and hotter. It is very silly to call her as stiff as the poker, for you know when iron is hot you can bend it, and you can't bend her. To be sure you can strike sparks of fire out—plenty of them. It is something like stroking pussy's

hair the wrong way; Gwen's eyes get like coals, and I am sure I could see them in the dark. I should not like to shut myself up in a dark room with her when I have thoroughly heated her, so I can't ascertain that fact.'

'And why not, Miss Geraldine? what do you think she would do to you?' asked Collinson, laughing.

'Fly round my throat, and strangle me, perhaps, for I am sure there would be no shaking her off.'

Catherine came into the room; nothing she disliked more than to find Geraldine with Collinson. This Geraldine knew, but unabashed, she cried:

'I am counting over all the little harmless modes of amusement of which Mdlle. Vernet cannot deprive me. I believe I can reckon at least ten different ways of tormenting her and Gwen. First, to begin with Gwen: putting the whole school-room in disorder just after she has arranged it beautifully. Only think of that silly woman supposing for one moment that she should put me to shame, by installing Gwen in the office of keeping all the book-cases, and the writing-table, and everything else tidy, with sundry comments on the discomfort and vexation which she has daily endured through my slovenly ways. Yesterday she actually ventured, she said, to tell Ann that now there was a young lady in the school-room, she might put the new cloth on the writing-table. When it was brought, Gwen arranged it proudly—made it hang just the same length all round—and the proper distance from the ground. I pulled one of the corners—you know they have heavy tassels on them,—and said that it looked much better a little *dégaçé*. Gwen said nothing, but put it straight. I pulled it crooked again, and she straight again. I could not allow that. I gave it rather a sharp twitch while it was still in her hold, and oh! sad catastrophe, more terrible and sudden than even Mdlle. Vernet could have anticipated! over went the inkstand, just replenished by Gwen, and the black ill-natured stream took the course which led it

over her poor little writing-case, which she takes such care of!’

‘Which her brother, her only brother, gave her,’ said Catherine.

‘Her brother, her only brother,’ repeated Geraldine. ‘Why, I have no brother at all, and I do very well. But if you had seen Gwen’s look then!—the flash of lightning! I felt myself all over to find out where I was struck. I was going to wipe the writing-case, when she snatched it from my touch, and darted out of the room into her own, and locked the door. I could hear her washing and scouring the poor book in a way which I knew must spoil it. I called to her to stop—no answer. I am sure I don’t care whether it is spoiled or not!’

‘What a fuss!’ cried Collinson.

‘Miss Geraldine,’ said Catherine, ‘you have talked a great deal too much nonsense and untruth too. You do care—you know very well that you care—else why did you beg your mamma to bring you another writing-case from London, unless it was that you felt ashamed of your fault, and sorry for your cousin’s vexation!’

For the first time Geraldine looked out of countenance, and coloured: ‘Nonsense. I am not a bit ashamed. How do you know that I want it for her? I told mamma to bring one twice as large and twice as convenient in every way, and to give twice as much money for it as the other could possibly have cost: there!’ And Geraldine paused, as if to challenge the applause of her hearers, and from one she received the desired tribute.

‘Well, I know who will be ashamed when she sees how generous you can be, and will wish then that she could have kept her temper, and not have been put out by such a trifle,’ said Collinson.

‘I don’t think,’ observed Catherine, quietly, ‘that Miss Owen’s value for the gift will depend on its size and price exactly. If you show her that you are sorry to have hurt her feelings by idle mischief, which had

no such object in view, I dare say she will not think more about it.'

'Her feelings!' cried Geraldine; 'it was the writing-case that was hurt, I believe. There is the carriage, and mamma coming, who knows how to put everything right that is wrong. She sees me—she holds up a parcel to me, smiling—to tell that she has done all I asked her to do, as she always does—dear, good mamma!' And Geraldine bounded down stairs.

'What a giddy creature,' said Collinson, laughing. 'Not much good to lecture her.'

Catherine made no reply as she quitted the room. Mrs. Faulkner had scarcely put her foot on the step of the carriage when Geraldine was at her side, her golden curls dancing on her shoulders, expressing, as it were, her impatience.

'Give it me, give it me, quick!' she exclaimed.

'What, Geraldine! not one kiss?'

'Twenty, if you please, mamma, only not now,' cried Geraldine, reluctantly granting one, while at the same time tearing the paper from the packet, and scattering it on the ground.

'Beautiful!' she pronounced. 'She ought to be very glad that the other was spoiled.'

'Oh! Miss Geraldine, for shame!' It was Catherine's voice.

'Catherine, you have been teasing me all day,' cried Geraldine, passionately, and brushing past her, she ran up to Gwen's room. Now, of all the annoyances which had begun to rain plentifully on Gwen of late, there was not one that she disliked more than Geraldine's mode of rushing into her chamber. Shy, nervous, sensitive, to be broken in on thus suddenly in moments of imagined privacy and security, to be surprised when sometimes weeping for her lost home, or struggling with an exasperated temper, or writing those effusions which were a relief to a burdened heart, was peculiarly trying to Gwen, and not less so at this moment than

at former periods. Geraldine observed not how she was occupied ; she hurried to the table where she sat, threw down the gilded, showy, and really beautiful case before her, exclaiming, breathlessly : ‘ There, Gwen, that is for you—because I spoiled your other, you know.’

But the exclamation of gratitude and delight which Geraldine had expected, came not. As the heart did not utter it, neither would the lips.

‘ This case—this handsome case for me?’ said Gwen, slowly. ‘ Oh ! no, thank you, Geraldine. I would rather not—indeed I would—it is much too good for me—not at all what I wish—the other suits me exactly—even now. Indeed it was not so much hurt as I thought at first, and I am afraid, Geraldine, I was very ill-tempered about it.’

Softened into this acknowledgment by Geraldine’s generosity, but firm in her refusal of the costly gift, Gwen put it from her, Geraldine gazing on her with amazement : ‘ What ! not take it—when I got it on purpose for you—you little, proud, ill-tempered creature. This is nothing but bearing malice—unless, indeed, Catherine prepared it all—taught you to give me a lesson, perhaps ! Now, will you have it or not ?’

‘ Certainly not *now*, thank you,’ replied Gwen. ‘ No one has taught me anything about it—I speak for myself.’

‘ What a hypocritical ‘thank you.’ Why can’t you say ‘I hate you and your gifts,’ then I should believe you.’

‘ But it would not be true, and I can’t say what is untrue to obtain the honour of your belief,’ replied Gwen, superciliously.

‘ If you could either love or forgive, if you had an atom of generosity or good temper in you, you could never behave like this,’ cried Geraldine, with increasing fire. ‘ There,’ she said, snatching the case from the table, and throwing it on the ground, ‘ it may lie there

for any one who likes it. I will never touch it again.' And she quitted the room as abruptly as she had entered it.

Gwen looked at the case lying on the floor, and then burst into tears: 'Oh, mother! oh, Hugh! How miserable I am here! how much of this am I to bear? I never understand when I am right and when I am wrong. I did use to know that at least, when I was with you.'

Meanwhile Geraldine hastened to her mother's room. There she found Mrs. Faulkner and Catherine, whom, in spite of her recent accusation, she was better pleased to see than Collinson. The latter never got her out of her difficulties, the former, usually did. Besides, the girl had a full conviction that the one she could trust, and the other not. She chose to be waited on, flattered, 'sugared,' as she called it, by Collinson; and 'then I like a little of your mustard and vinegar all the better, Catherine,' she would say. So she chose to qualify Catherine's rebukes, well knowing that there was not a temper in the house that could bear comparison with hers. At present she walked up to her mother's toilette-table with glowing cheeks, and an air of considerable mortification: 'What do you think, mamma? She says she does not like it—she positively will not have it.'

'Well, my dear, I am sorry for it,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, good-naturedly; 'if she does not like it, it can't be helped. I really thought I chose the prettiest there, but we can change it.'

'She won't like anything,' exclaimed Geraldine, impetuously. 'That is what she means.'

'No, no, I am sure you are mistaken. I am sure she must be pleased with your kindness, if not with my taste.'

'I don't think so,' replied Geraldine, pouting.

'Have you been kind?' asked Catherine. Geraldine darted an angry look at her.

‘Now don’t be too hard on the child,’ said Mrs. Faulkner. ‘What could be kinder than to think of this at all?’

‘But, madam,’ continued Catherine, ‘I wish to ascertain if Miss Geraldine did give it in a manner that could make it acceptable. No one knows better than you do that half the value of a gift lies in that. This poor child cared extremely for the book which her brother had given her—not half so handsome as Miss Geraldine’s, of course—but can’t you imagine, ma’am, what she thought of it? the first she had ever had—and brought from her home, and purchased with the scanty savings of a school-boy’s purse. I dare say Miss Gwen knew well how many a little thing Hugh must have denied himself to get a present for her; whereas, Miss Geraldine has nothing to do, but to run and ask you to buy her the prettiest and the costliest thing you can see, and it does not make the least difference to her in any way what you give for it. It is natural enough that Miss Gwen should think more of her brother’s generosity than of what is called generosity in Miss Geraldine. I don’t deny that it was a kind thought, and it may have been a kind deed—but was it?’

‘I was kind enough,’ replied Geraldine, by no means blind to the truth of Catherine’s remarks, ‘till she said, in her cold way, that she would not have it.’

‘And then?’

‘Then I answered that it was her ill-temper and malice that made her refuse.’

‘Oh! Geraldine, that was not the way,’ cried Mrs. Faulkner; ‘but, really, Catherine, I can’t help being afraid that this girl has an unforgiving temper. Where is the case, Geraldine, my love? Shall I take it to her?’

‘I don’t care whether she accept it or not, now. I have been so teased about it,’ sobbed Geraldine.

‘Oh! but if she comes and thanks you for it?’

‘I don’t want her thanks,’ returned Geraldine, thinking it very unlikely, from what she remembered of Gwen’s demeanour, that they would be proffered.

‘Did you leave it with her?’

‘It is on the floor in her room.’

‘On the floor. How odd! How did it come there?’

‘I threw it there.’

Mrs. Faulkner was ashamed to look at Catherine, but, rising, said: ‘Here, give me my dressing-gown, Catherine, I will see about it myself.’

Gwen heard a light knock at her door. This was treating her with a delicacy which she always met with from Catherine, but it was not her well-known and usually welcome knock. Whose, then, could it be? She answered it, and there stood Mrs. Faulkner, looking so pretty in her white dress, and her beautiful dark hair hanging about her, and her delicate little slippered feet, and as kind as pretty, and Gwen felt both.

‘May I come in, my dear?’

‘Oh! yes, ma’am,’ replied Gwen, hastily disencumbering a chair of the books that lay on it, to make her a seat. As she followed Mrs. Faulkner’s eye to the writing-case stretched on the floor, she coloured deeply, picked it up, and laid it on the table with care.

‘It is a pity to see it there, is it not, Gwen?’ said Mrs. Faulkner.

‘Yes, indeed, ma’am,’ replied Gwen, quite incapable of accusing Geraldine.

‘But I don’t blame you for that. I know how it came there. Geraldine told me all about it. She always does tell me everything, and never tries to screen herself after these little fits of passion. Now Gwen (and she drew her gently towards her) don’t you think it would have been kinder—and I am sure your mother wishes you to be kind—to have accepted Geraldine’s pretty present, when she had so much pleasure in offering it?’

‘I could not,’ said Gwen, in a low, deep voice.

Unfortunately, Gwen’s mood was not in the least comprehensible to Mrs. Faulkner, and she only felt, as she had said to Catherine, afraid that her temper was unforgiving.

‘But, Gwen,’ she said, after a short silence, ‘don’t you think that you ought to try to forget the past? She did not even mean to hurt your book.’

‘No, I don’t believe that she did—’

‘Then why is it so difficult to forgive?’

‘It is not that,’ said Gwen.

But Mrs. Faulkner, instead of stopping to ask what it was, partly from the aversion which she always had thoroughly to examine any subject, and partly because she was thinking much more of making things smooth for Geraldine than of taking any real pains with the characters of either of the children, or feeling any lively interest in Gwen, continued :

‘You never will get on well with Geraldine, unless you can forgive and forget her little passions. She does not mean what she says in them ; there can’t be a sweeter temper than hers when they are over. I want you to be friends, Gwen, and to be happy together. I sent for you here that you might make each other happy, and I know that your mother would be grieved, as I am, if there be differences and disputes between you for ever.’

Gwen’s tears began to flow.

‘Here, give me the case—the cause of this silly dispute ; I will take it away—lock it up ; neither of you shall see it any more.’

‘Oh ! but, ma’am, if you think I ought to keep it—’

‘Why, Gwen !’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, losing patience, ‘you really don’t know whether you like to keep or to part with it.’

‘No,’ said Gwen, sadly, ‘I don’t. I should wish to do exactly as you think best.’

‘Then keep it, by all means,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, starting up; and she kissed Gwen and hurried away.

Gwen afterwards tried rather stiffly to tell Geraldine that she had never doubted that she had meant to be very kind, but Geraldine would not hear one word of explanation.

‘It is all right, now—don’t let us talk about it, please!’

And the beautiful writing-case lay on Gwen’s table unopened.





CHAPTER XI.

A sweet attractive kind of grace,
A full assurance given by looks,
Continuall comfort in a face
The lineaments of Gospel bookes.

SPENSER.

CATHERINE one day came to Gwen's room to ask her to take a walk on the common to see a poor cottager residing on it. She often made Gwen the companion of her visits to the poor, but could never obtain permission to take Geraldine where she thought it would have been so good for her to go. Even Gwen had been forced to plead earnestly, as she did not often plead.

'Indeed, I am used to the sort of thing; mamma has always wished me to be so. I know it is only what she would desire,' she said, when first Mrs. Faulkner nervously started objections on seeing her prepare to accompany Catherine as a matter of course.

Mrs. Faulkner yielded not unreluctantly—'in full reliance, remember, Catherine, in full reliance on your discretion.'

Neither Mrs. Faulkner nor Geraldine could understand why Catherine and Gwen cared so very much to carry this point. A remembrance of Mary stole across Mrs. Faulkner, and unnerved her opposition. 'Not that Gwen in the least resembles Mary—oh! dear, no! But who ever was like that sweet angel, except herself?'

'One moment, Catherine, and I am ready,' answered

Gwen, cheerfully, turning the key of her old, blotted writing-case as she spoke.

Catherine's eye glanced at Geraldine's present. 'I don't think I have ever found you using this,' she said.

'No,' replied Gwen, with some confusion; 'I don't think you have.'

'Now I should like to know why you were so averse to accept it—whether it was simply that your pride was hurt by Miss Geraldine's violence, or what it was?'

'Well, Catherine,' answered Gwen, thoughtfully and humbly, 'I don't think that it was all pride. I have asked myself that. I could not endure that Geraldine should fancy that she could give me what I should like as well—better, than Hugh's gift. If she had just said, 'I never meant to injure his, and I am sorry,' I could have forgiven, and forgotten too, soon—at once, perhaps; but I could see that she treated his with contempt, just because hers was something finer, and she expected me to do the same!'

As they walked across the common, Gwen said to Catherine:

'Talk to me about Mary, as you do sometimes when we are together thus. Tell me, was she the least like Geraldine—to look at, I mean? Would a stranger have known them to be sisters?'

'I can scarcely tell—I think not; but I never saw her till sickness had made such ravages as to render it hardly possible that much resemblance could be traced between the wan, thin, fragile-looking girl and a child glowing with health and brightness, like Miss Geraldine. People told me that there never had been the same promise of beauty at any time—that Miss Geraldine saucily spoke of her as 'dear, plain Mary.' I can only say that to me she was beautiful—not just at first, perhaps. There are looks of hers that will linger by me till my dying day. They are among my

sweetest recollections of the past—they are my pleasantest companions in the present, and certainly my best reminders of what is to come, and I heartily wish that you had seen them too. They would have taught any beholder, I think, to understand better those words, ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ The holy joy that sometimes brightened her countenance was so lively that it suggested the belief that some foresight, some foretaste had been vouchsafed to her of those pleasures which are at God’s right hand. But she did not think so; she said that it was purely hope that animated her, and no assurance gave her more satisfaction than that which is written, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’ She did not like any books that attempted to picture them too definitely. She used, with a faint tone and gesture of distaste, to stop me if I read such to her, making no further comment; she was modest and diffident in finding fault, even with books. She seldom said more than, ‘I don’t want to hear that, Catherine, thank you,’ and then seemed to shrink away into her inner self. But if no human pen has written about Heaven what it gave her much satisfaction to hear, there were verses in the Book of Revelations which, uncommented on, she would never weary of. They it was which used most frequently to bring into her dear face the ecstasy of happiness I tell you of, and then her loving heart was fain to embrace all others in the same hope and joy. However, among other things of which she was fond, were some verses in an old book, Miss Gwen, that I should like to show you at home.’

‘Catherine, can’t you say them now? I should like to hear them.’

‘Of course, I have them by heart, for her dear memory’s sake,’ and Catherine repeated, feelingly:

'He is a path, if any be misled;
 He is a robe, if any naked be;
 If any chance to hunger, he is bread;
 If any be a bondman, He is free,
 If any be but weak, how strong is He!
 To dead men life He is, to sick men health,
 To blind men sight, and to the needy wealth,
 A pleasure without loss, a treasure without stealth!'

'Beautiful!' said Gwen. 'Is there not more?'
 'Yes; this anticipation of Heaven:

'There is a place beyond that flaming hill
 From whence the stars their thin appearance shed;
 A place beyond all place, where never ill
 Nor impure thought was ever harbored,
 But saintly heroes are for ever said
 To keep an everlasting Sabbath-rest,
 Still wishing that of which they are possessors,
 Enjoying but one joy, but one of all joys best.

The book is called *Christ's Victories and Triumph in Heaven and Earth over and after Death*. There are many other fine stanzas in it, particularly two on our Lord's forty days' fast in the wilderness, after which the angels ministered unto Him. I think I can say those.'

'Dear Catherine, do.'

'But to their Lord, now musing in His thought,
 A heavenly volley of light angels flew,
 And from his Father Him a banquet brought
 Through the fine element, for well they knew
 After His Lenten fast He hungry grew.
 And as he fed, the holy quires combine
 To sing a hymn of the celestial Trine,
 All thought to pass, and each was past all thought divine.

'The birds' sweet notes to sonnet out their joys,
 Attuned to the layes angelical,
 And to the birds the winds attune their poise,

And to the winds the waters hoarsely call,
And Echo back again revoicèd all,
That the whole valley rung with victory.
But now our Lord to rest doth homeward flie—

See how the Night comes stealing from the mountains high !

‘That makes me think of Spenser,’ cried Gwen.
‘And you used to read things like this with Mary ?’

‘Many such ; I read a great deal with her.’

‘I wish I had been here in those days, Catherine. Oh ! how much happier, how much better they would have made me ; surely every one under the same roof must have felt the influence of her presence ?’

‘Yes,’ said Catherine, with a sigh ; ‘but the influence of her memory,—that abides with us.’

‘I wonder how Geraldine, how Mrs. Faulkner can be exactly what they are, if it be so,’ thought Gwen, but she knew that this was not a thought to be breathed to Catherine, who never encouraged nor allowed comments on the faults or deficiencies of her mistress, or of her mistress’s child, to be addressed to her. Yet who felt, deplored them as did Catherine ? She was not sorry that their arrival at the cottage they sought broke off the conversation just when it had reached a somewhat painful point, and that sympathy with the present should recal her from the past, and forbid her to speculate on the future.

The one circumstance of the writing-case, which we have given in all its details, will convey an accurate idea of the species of trial which Gwen was callèd on to encounter, and the species of annoyance which Geraldine was allowed, wantonly rather than maliciously, to inflict. And surely it was no easy task for a girl so young as Gwen, well-principled it is true, and in part already disciplined, but accustomed to be the object of the tenderest affection and interest, to accommodate herself to a situation so little premeditated, where, if her talents and her energy procured her respect, it was not untinctured with the fear which chills love, and where all her natural deficiencies were recognised with

disdain or pity. As Gwen herself expressed it to Catherine, who ventured to point out Mrs. Faulkner's exceeding kindness: 'It is very true, but she pities me: mamma never pitied me.' To herself, Gwen added: 'mocked by Geraldine, pitied by Mrs. Faulkner,—but I can bear it.'

In a certain mode Gwen could bear much, though often 'vexed as a thing that is raw.' She never had the violent ebullitions in which Geraldine was constantly indulging. There was something in violence which to Gwen appeared contemptible and ludicrous too. She had come to a practical understanding of what has recently been better expressed than she or I could express it. 'We sometimes think of the passionate man as of a man of strong will, and of real though ungoverned energy. But the word passion declares to us most plainly the contrary, for, as a very solemn use of it declares, it means, properly, 'suffering'; and a passionate man is not a man doing something, but one suffering something to be done on him. When, then, a man or child is 'in a passion,' this is no coming out in him of a strong will, of a real energy, but rather the proof that for the time, at least, he has no will, no energy. He is suffering, not doing; suffering his anger or what other evil temper it may be, to lord over him without control. Let no one, then, think of passion as a sign of strength.*' So Gwen had found out. She saw that passion exhausted and enfeebled Geraldine; she had felt the same effects of it on herself; that she might be strong, she strove for self-mastery, and as far as repression of outward vehemence went, she had attained it in no small degree. But she did not quell the spirit of sarcasm strong within her. She did not forbid herself to turn and sting when struck and trodden on. She could chafe Geraldine into madness, and often did; and unhappily Mdlle. Vernet, instead of rebuking or even checking Gwen, sometimes exulted in Ge-

* TRENCH *On the Study of Words.*

raldine's discomfiture,—sometimes even forgot her duty so far as to make use of Gwen's biting tongue as a weapon. Had not the far more judicious Catherine, better regulated in temper and in mind, been at hand, more mischief would have happened than really did occur. Over each of the children she exercised a restraining influence; both felt, and one at least acknowledged, her just appeals to heart and to understanding. Both loved and respected her. To none would Geraldine so candidly confess her faults, while Gwen was ever ready to trust to her fairness, and believe in the truth of her verdicts. She felt that whatever favour or kindness she might meet with from others, from Catherine alone did she receive unvarying justice,—and this Gwen valued far beyond any other concession that human beings can make. The exercise of impartiality showed in Catherine a mind raised above the influence of passion, for she loved Geraldine almost as tenderly as her mother did, and was scarcely less sensible of her attractions. But Gwen, if destitute of like charms, had awakened no small interest in Catherine, who was capable of understanding somewhat of the depths of her heart and mind, and who revered her conscientiousness, truth, and zeal. She watched her now engaged in a sore conflict, and lent her what aid she could, but she knew that the victory must be with Gwen herself, and that something must work from within, in the failure of which all outward energy would be insufficient.

Since Gwen's first arrival at Lascelles, she had spent one week at Easter with her mother and Hugh, a boon won for her by Geraldine, who exclaimed:

‘I am sure we are always hearing enough of rewards for industry, and rewards for good behaviour, and for early rising, and for neatness, and for punctuality from Mdlle. Vernet, given in that incomparable establishment in which she was herself educated, and of which she is a praiseworthy example. No one ever earned them all more justly than Gwen, so, mother,

do let us give her a prize, and I know what it shall be,—a week's holidays at home. Now, Gwen, what say you to that ?

This generous consideration touched Gwen deeply ; She replied little in words, but the language of her eyes was so unmistakable, that Geraldine was perfectly satisfied. Gwen went home, and warmed by gratitude, spoke with no little enthusiasm of the kindness she received, with no little toleration of Geraldine's faults ; at a distance it was not so difficult to lose sight of them, and of the trials common to her daily life at Lascelles. Gwen found abundant recompense for all her toil in the approval of her mother and Hugh, and their unfeigned surprise at the progress which she had already made. She returned more ambitious of excellence, more hopeful of its attainment than ever ; more acceptable therefore to Mdlle. Vernet, and more irksome to Geraldine.

It was within a month of the long Midsummer vacation, a portion of which Gwen was to pass at Winchester, when some slight circumstances which might have escaped less observant eyes than Gwen's, made her start as on the brink of a precipice, and exclaim : ' What if I should go, never to return ! '

The fact was, that matters had been gradually growing worse, because they had not grown better. For a time Mrs. Faulkner had indeed kept her eyes as resolutely closed to whatever threatened the overthrow of her plan as Gwen could desire ; but all were growing weary—teachers, servants, all ; all felt that things could not go on as they did. What, then, would ensue ? This was the inquiry Gwen made, first with terror, then with a feeling of despair.

' Will the attempt to educate me with Geraldine be relinquished as quite unsuccessful, and will all the good I promised myself from it disappear like the morning dew ? Is this Geraldine's fault, or is it mine ? What have I been about ? Am I on the point of losing that which was to make me not a burden but

an assistance to my mother? My absence even now enables her to do for Hugh more than she could do before! But I see it all—I shall not return.'

These thoughts harassed Gwen unceasingly. Sleep and appetite forsook her; she concealed the want of them as well as she could, but her pale unhappy face attracted Mrs. Faulkner's attention more than once; and she said to Catherine, with a sigh:

'What can be the matter with that child? Have she and Geraldine been quarrelling more than usual? I am afraid this never will do.'

'No, ma'am,' replied Catherine; 'they have certainly had no particular disagreements just now. I will see what it is.'

Catherine repaired to Gwen's room that night. She found her in bed, certainly, but awake, her eyes red from want of sleep or weeping. Catherine placed the light so as not to distress them, and then seated herself, taking one of Gwen's hands that lay near her; the other arm was tossed over her head. She looked anything but at rest.

'And now, Miss Gwen, tell me, what is the matter with you?'

Gwen did not speak.

'I am the first person you ever saw here—the first person who brought you into this little room, and tried to make you comfortable in it. I should have thought that you might have spoken to me without so much difficulty.'

'I can't speak without difficulty to any one,' answered Gwen, 'and on such a subject!'

'What subject?' asked Catherine, surprised at these last words.

'Well, Catherine, I don't know—it may be all fancy—yet how it does torment me! Perhaps you will say it is merely my own idea, but I can't help fearing that when I go home at Midsummer, I shall never return here.'

‘And do you care very much about returning?’

Gwen looked on her with astonishment. ‘Do I not?’ she said, half resentfully.

‘Then I am surprised that you have not in some respects behaved differently,’ remarked Catherine, quietly.

‘Surprised,’ repeated Gwen, slowly, ‘and ashamed—I feel both.’ Then suddenly raising herself, and turning her dark eyes full on Catherine, she said, ‘Do you think that it is quite too late?’

‘For what?’

‘To make these differences you spoke of—’

‘Do you understand clearly what they ought to be?’

‘Ah! yes—I think I do. I mean, trying to get on better with Geraldine,’ said Gwen, timidly.

‘And how would you do that?’

‘In more ways than one. She thinks she teazes me, and so she does; but I know that I teaze her, and when she does not see how, she feels it.’

‘Quite true,’ said Catherine.

‘Yes, I lash her with my tongue—I make her feel that I despise her childishness, her ignorance, her caprice—I—’ Gwen was going on with increasing emphasis, when she stopped abruptly, either checked by the expression of Catherine’s face, or some whisper of her own conscience. She threw herself down on her pillow and cried, ‘For such petty, unworthy triumphs, for such a game as I should blush for my mother and Hugh to see me play, I have been casting away all that I intended to achieve for them! I have risen in the morning and staked all that I have lain here planning to do, on a contest with Geraldine—for what?’ She burst into an agony of tears.

Catherine regarded her with compassion; she let her emotion have its way, and, when it began to subside, bent over her, saying gently:

‘What, Gwen—are there no eyes piercing where your mother’s and your brother’s cannot enter, about your bed and about your path, spying out all your

ways? Are there no kind angels grieving to see a Christian child relinquishing high and holy motives, to be the sport and slave of evil tempers? What think you do those pure beings feel for us when they see us losing our way and our reward? My dear child, you have been fixing your eyes too much on earthly incitements, bending your thoughts too much on working out a scheme of your own. You are failing altogether—you are beaten down; but rise, take a higher flight this time, and you will do better. Now, think a little, and tell me. Did you come here solely for yourself and your own mother? Don't you owe anything to Mrs. Faulkner? Are you not bound to accomplish her project as much as your own? She very generously denies you no advantage that she thinks you will avail yourself of, even such as for Geraldine alone she would scarcely provide. But she did not send for you here merely to teach you all that you are eager to learn, but to make you a companion to her child, and an improving one too; and if she finds that Geraldine is only the worse for you, why should she ask you to return?

'But I can't be expected to make Geraldine different from what I find her.'

'You might even accomplish that, and at least you need not aggravate her faults,' replied Catherine.

'From this time, Catherine, you shall see; she shall not provoke me, and I will not provoke her.'

'Don't be too confident—don't promise too much.'

'You must help me,' said Gwen, timidly; 'a look—a word from you—'

'Nay, that seems sometimes to make you more stubborn.'

'I know,' said Gwen, with shame, 'when I am checked—pulled back—I do feel inclined to press forward; but I will not now. I desire to stop—I will do so at the least touch.'

Catherine smiled; she thought that a strong hand would be required to hold the bridle.

‘I know I shall want help,’ added Gwen.

‘Yes,’ replied Catherine, ‘and you have been taught where to seek it.’

Gwen threw her arms round Catherine’s neck, pressing closely to her, and whispering :

‘And you—will you not seek it for me?’

‘I will,’ said her friend ; and Gwen lay down to rest with a peace and hopefulness long absent from her breast.

The child rose up with all her resolutions in full vigour.

‘I think things will go better now, ma’am,’ said Catherine, to Mrs. Faulkner.

‘I am sure I shall be very glad,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, languidly, ‘but don’t tell me anything about it. I really am quite wearied by these childish squabbles.’

Catherine desisted. She felt that it would be an useless labour to repeat to Mrs. Faulkner all she learned and observed of a character like Gwen’s. ‘Let her actions speak for herself,’ she thought ; ‘after all, words are of no value but as the promise of deeds.’

Gwen’s deeds were really worthy of Catherine’s hopeful anticipations. The peace of the ensuing month was felt by all, though fully accounted for by none. Gwen would not quarrel, and Geraldine was surprised at a change which she could not comprehend nor describe. By degrees she accustomed herself to go on more quietly with her cousin, finding it rather dull sometimes, and turning elsewhere to expend her caprice or discontent—for when was a spoilt child ever contented?

Gwen went home, and exercised with extraordinary fortitude her old habit of keeping back from her mother whatever she thought likely to harass her ; she guarded all her secret discomforts from Hugh also, lest he might indignantly or inadvertently reveal them to Mrs. Owen. She expatiated freely on the

excellent instructions which she received from Mdlle. Vernet, spoke of Catherine with cordial affection, of Mrs. Faulkner with gratitude. She could also talk of Geraldine, her beauty, her vivacity, the idolatry bestowed on her—but here she grew more reserved, and avoided all ground that might lead to dangerous inquiries.





CHAPTER XII.

And thus she said in hir benigne voice.

CHAUCER.

FOR three years after Gwen's arrival, Mdlle. Vernet consented to remain at Lascelles. At the end of that period she suddenly took more serious offence than she had ever been known to evince before, at some fault on the part of Geraldine, which did not appear more culpable than many a previous one which had been forgiven. This time, however, she was not to be mollified. She was resolved to take her departure, and after all, Mrs. Faulkner was less unhappy about it than Mdlle. Vernet had anticipated. She was, in fact, rather tired of the clever French-woman and her system, a scolding, forcing, urging system : Geraldine had never loved her, and now they parted in high wrath. Catherine had some esteem for her, and therefore felt some sorrow for her loss ; Gwen cared more than any one, and Mdlle. Vernet regretted in Gwen the scholar who did her most honour of any she had ever instructed. There were many points of sympathy between the two. Gwen had derived some good and some evil from her intercourse with her ; more good than evil, certainly, for Mdlle. Vernet had more good than evil to impart.

The next proposition was, that Geraldine should go for a year to a very grand and very expensive seminary for finishing young ladies' education ; the idea amused her greatly, and she readily adopted it.

'It will be entertaining to have ten companions instead of one—indeed I don't call Gwen much of a companion—and all new! I think I shall like it very much, and if I don't, you know, I can come home. But what will become of Gwen?'

A cloud passed over Gwen's face, a cloud not to be seen through, an expression not to be read in a moment, and not even a moment for scrutiny did she allow. She left the room quickly, reached her own, secured herself against intrusion, and for a while battled not with distress.

'Much has been done for me—very much—yet the sight of more beyond makes it all seem as nothing. This is very wrong, very ungrateful; but I don't know how to help it. Geraldine, who is utterly regardless of all means of self-improvement, who would as soon, sooner, go to a dancing school to play with the girls there than compete for any worthier prize—on her all this is to be thrown away—all this is denied to me! But I am in quite a wrong path now—I know that well.'

Reproaching herself with these repinings, Gwen strove hard, as she had often striven before, to bring herself to be

Thankful for all God takes away,
Humbled by all He gives.

'I do think that poor girl will be grievously disappointed if you go to Staunton without her,' said Mrs Faulkner, after the sight of Gwen's pale face and contracted brow, as she returned to her usual occupations.

'Disappointed?' repeated Geraldine. 'Disappointed to go back to her mother and to Hugh, and away from me! I thought she would be delighted.'

'Ah!' observed Mrs. Faulkner, shaking her head, and surprised at her own penetration, 'you can't in the least understand how that girl's heart is set on getting on.'

‘No, indeed I can’t in the least,’ replied Geraldine, laughing. ‘But, dear mamma, I will not let you talk just like mademoiselle herself.’

‘What I am thinking of is that I can’t bear to grieve this poor little thing, if all she wants to make her happy is to go with you—’

‘To be finished, mamma, as Lady Rivers calls it.’

‘I am sure Mr. Faulkner would not refuse his permission ; it is but a hundred pounds, or so, difference.’

‘What can that signify?’ cried Geraldine.

But in her heart, Geraldine felt that she would rather have gone to Staunton without Gwen than with her.

‘I would sooner have it all new. Gwen will be watching me, and remarking how I behave to the other girls—I don’t know how I shall behave to them—I never have been in any place like it before.’ Geraldine had a half-defined dislike to the idea of the constraint that she knew Gwen would be to her. She was right. It would undoubtedly have been far more for her good to have gone alone, with none to mark any amendment in her conduct, any unwonted acts of concession and subordination, to make her, in fact, too proud to mend or to alter. But Mrs. Faulkner had not sufficient judgment to consider this ; she was stimulated by a good-natured desire to accomplish to the utmost the wishes of Gwen before she returned to her mother, and Geraldine had a native generosity which forbade opposition. Mr. Faulkner was perfectly willing to acquiesce in Diane’s proposal ; he saw its kindness, and the execution of it gratified his own liberality. Mrs. Faulkner was eager to enjoy the pleasure of giving pleasure. She called Gwen to her sofa.

‘My good little patient Gwen, into what beautiful order you have got my netting-silks ! I really thought they never could have recovered Geraldine’s last sorting of them. You deserve a reward, and you shall have one. Sit down and write by this post to

your dear mamma, and ask her leave to go to Staunton with Geraldine. Shall you like that, Gwen?' And she gave her a kiss.

Gwen's eyes sparkled, and she returned Mrs. Faulkner's embrace with a sudden warmth which astonished each equally.

'How generous you are—you have always been!' she exclaimed, speaking with agitation and difficulty.

'No, no, never mind that; make haste; you will be too late for the post, and why should you be in suspense any longer than is necessary? Not that your mother will refuse, will she?' replied Mrs. Faulkner, smiling brightly.

Gwen felt that she had never yet been half grateful enough for all Mrs. Faulkner's kindness. She could not restrain herself; whether her letter were to be too late or not, some present expression she must give to the emotion that filled her heart. She rose hastily, left the writing-table, and came back to Mrs. Faulkner's side, and kneeling down, looked earnestly in her face. She even caught her hand, and pressed it to her lips—

'If I could make some return—could prove my gratitude!'

'My dear child!' cried Mrs. Faulkner, startled and affected on seeing Gwen so much unlike anything she had ever been before; 'My dear child, I don't want any proof of gratitude. I am quite sure you feel a great deal more than is necessary—a great deal more than you ever say. It is a pleasure to me to do anything for dear Mary Owen's child, and you have always repaid my care by the pains which you have taken. Nothing has ever been thrown away on you, Gwen.'

'Nothing shall be,' replied Gwen, in a low voice.

'There, go back to your letter.'

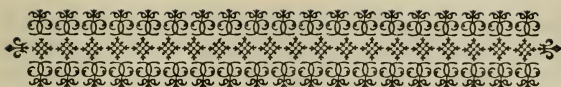
Gwen complied, and as she wrote it she was feeling what Mrs. Faulkner's generous spirit would not have borne to hear, and what her own heart would not

have uttered had there been more of love mixed with her gratitude—

‘This is a great debt! I hope God will one day enable me to repay it in some measure.’

A day did arrive—little anticipated by any—in which Gwen requited all that she had received—in which the balance was incalculably on her side.





CHAPTER XIII.

Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE whole plan of Staunton was full of delight—full of promise for Gwen. Her mother, too, augured well of it, and for her sake accepted this costly boon from the Faulkners, proffered with the delicacy which is the indispensable ornament of generosity.

‘Now,’ thought Gwen, ‘I shall test myself. I have hitherto had no one to measure by but Geraldine, and she is neither clever nor industrious; in many ways her performances are disgraceful, and she does not care. I know very well that now, when so much money is going to be lavished on her, she does not really mean to exert herself on any one point except her singing; that she values. She sees the influence it has over others—the power it gives over their admiration and their feelings. It is a great gift—great as her beauty—greater almost. Could the plainest woman sing as Geraldine may and will, all hearts would open to her. M. Bürger said the other day that my touch on the piano was to me what a fine voice is to a vocalist; it is a less fluctuating possession. I will content myself with it. Then Geraldine has little but her voice to boast of;—how hard it is to teach her a song!’

‘I shall like to be thrown into the midst of a whole circle of girls—I have seen so few; mere dressed-up dolls in a drawing-room I count as nothing. I shall

know my companions as I know Geraldine—heart and mind; I shall gain experience, become better acquainted with myself; every change of circumstance furthers that—I have found myself very different at Lascelles from what I was at home—no such feelings tormented me there as here—my temper was unruffled. Would it have been better for me never to have quitted Hugh and my mother?

No, Gwen, it would not. Many more painful experiences are yet in keeping for you, and till they be passed, you know neither yourself nor Geraldine. Well for both will it be when that lacking knowledge shall be obtained.

Geraldine, who had given ready acquiescence at first, as the day arrived which was to separate her from her mother, grew alarmed. The idea of departure became as odious as it had been pleasing.

‘Why am I to go from dearest mamma, and beautiful Lascelles to this stupid school, to learn a quantity of things that I hate, and that no one will ever care or find out whether I know or not? It will make me extremely ill, I am sure of that. Study always has made my head ache, and now I shall cry till I am blind.’

‘My dearest child, I would not for worlds that you should injure your beautiful eyes; but really I thought you particularly wished to go to Staunton, and have lessons from Signor Fioritura.’

‘But I can have him from London. I suppose papa would rather pay for that than kill me by sending me away when I don’t like to go?’

‘There are so many reasons why you should spend a short time at Staunton——’

‘Pray don’t tell me any of them—they will not make the least difference to my feelings. I did believe that you loved me, but you never can if you persist in sending me from you!’ and Geraldine burst into a passionate flood of tears.

‘My child, my dear child! I do love you, only too well. But really last week!’

‘Last week, yes; but now that the time is come, it is quite a different thing, and I will stay here.’

‘Poor Gwen and her mother! how disappointed they will be if this scheme is relinquished!’

‘I can’t help that; am I to be sacrificed in everything to her? And what a little cold-hearted ambitious thing she must be to wish to quit you and Catherine—whom she pretends to be so fond of—just to get to Staunton, where she loves no one.’

‘Oh! but you forget her purpose.’

‘No, I don’t; but I am tired of hearing of it, moreover I don’t believe in it. Had she no such impulse, she would work on just as she does now. Let her go then, and toil as much as she likes, and may all good success go with her. Let Gwen go and work for her mother, and I will stay and play with mine; then we shall both have what we like best.’ And Geraldine hung round her mother with smiles as persuasive as her tears. Gwen came into the room at this moment, Catherine following her.

‘I sha’n’t go to Staunton,’ cried Geraldine, looking over her shoulder. A deep shade of annoyance came over Gwen’s face.

‘Now, Gwen, don’t look so black; you may go if you please, and it will please you none the worse to leave me behind, I know that. You can go, if your heart is set on it; my heart is set on staying here, with my own dear mother. There, Catherine, is not this a good plan for every one?’

‘No, miss, I don’t see that it is a good plan for any one but Miss Gwen,’ replied Catherine, quietly.

‘Well, I am happy to have your approval of any part of it; nevertheless, had you withheld it, my own approbation generally suffices for me, you know. Now will you be so good as to desire Collinson to separate my clothes from Gwen’s, and to go on with the packing which I had stopped altogether.’

‘But, Geraldine, my dear, this is really impossible.’

‘Impossible! I never know what that means.’

‘Now only wait a little. Catherine, come with me, I want to speak to you,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, leading Catherine into the room beyond in much distress, and leaving the two girls together.

‘You see, this child will not go.’

Catherine made no answer.

‘Do you think she will?’

‘I don’t see why not, ma’am.’

‘Why, she says she shall be ill and miserable. What duty can there be in the infliction of so much pain?’

‘I thought, ma’am, you had several reasons for sending her to Staunton, and I don’t hear one for keeping her at home except this fit of wilfulness.’

‘Oh! Catherine, don’t be harsh; this is not mere wilfulness, it is love for me. You don’t expect me to be insensible to that?’ Mrs. Faulkner melted into tears.

‘Indeed, ma’am,’ said Catherine, affectionately, ‘I can easily believe that separation is painful to you both; but I thought you had made up your mind to it. And Mr. Faulkner—so much has been said to him; I hardly think he will like to find everything reversed again.’

‘No, I know; and Lady Rivers—that hard woman—what an advantage it will give her. She will never cease to talk of my weakness.’

‘I don’t like Lady Rivers, ma’am,’ said Catherine, decidedly, ‘and I should be sorry to give her reason on her side.’

‘Oh! she always has that,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, despondently. ‘But really, Catherine, I dread the responsibility of sending that child away so much against her inclination.’

‘Do you, ma’am?’ said Catherine, with a smile, provoked by hearing Geraldine’s voice in the other room. ‘I shall go to Staunton, if I please,—and I do please.’

‘What a sudden change!’ exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner,

colouring; 'but if this last, it will remove all difficulties. We must not take too much notice; Geraldine does not like that.'

'Oh! ma'am, pardon me! but what an evil it is for this poor child to be so capricious. Pray decide for her, and let her abide by your decision. Miss Geraldine is sixteen now, and these extremes become every day more dangerous.'

Mrs. Faulkner was forced to listen to unwelcome truths, because she was actually a prisoner in the room to which she had retired, from the dread of an immediate encounter with Geraldine. But there was a silence in the adjoining apartment, which seemed to say that she had quitted it. Catherine opened the door, and found only Gwen. 'Well, Miss Gwen?

'She wishes to go now.'

'What made the change?'

'I can scarcely tell,—some objection that Collinson made about the packing,—something that Geraldine chose to fancy about my not wishing her to go.'

Catherine closed the door, and came nearer to Gwen.

'You are very desirous to go to Staunton,' she said.

'Very,' replied Gwen, not raising her eyes.

'Well—you will go—you will both go. I am sure of it.'

'I have been very anxious and very fretful all day, Catherine, I know I have. It is hard to be so tormented,—and Geraldine changes every minute.'

'Poor girl! I pity her more for her fickleness, than you for your uncertainty.'

'Ah! I suppose so; that is what mamma would say, I know. But, I can't help minding this more than I ought; and now that you tell me that we certainly shall go, I feel ashamed of not having borne uncertainty better.'

'That is just as it always is,' replied Catherine. 'The moment that a trial comes to an end, that a burden is lightened, we regret that we did not employ

more strength in the bearing of it; but these are vain regrets if they don't make us exert ourselves more in after trials.'

'It is not wrong in me to wish to go to Staunton? It is to finish Geraldine's education, you know,' said Gwen, smiling through the tears that glistened in her eyes, and with a little touch of satire in her tone,— 'and to make me fit to go home to my mother; they won't want me here.'

'Geraldine, in the midst of her nonsense, stipulated that you should not be disappointed,' observed Catherine.

'Did she?' cried Gwen; 'that was kind. They always have been unboundedly generous to me, one and all. I wish—oh! how I wish that I could be so to them!'

'You can; every one can be generous.'

'How?' asked Gwen. 'Oh! I believe that I know what you mean: by showing gratitude, kindness, forbearance; amongst strangers even Geraldine may care for those gifts. I would do a great deal for my benefactresses.'

'Every day do a little for them,' said Catherine, who observed that among the various epithets which Gwen used, 'love' had no place. And she left her.

'It is indeed more blessed to give than to receive,' thought Gwen; 'far more blessed in its effects on one's own heart. Here is Catherine, to whom they owe so much,—how she loves them! And I, who receive so much, find that difficult.'

The next morning Geraldine and Gwen started for Staunton.





CHAPTER XIV.

Her bounty, sweetness, beauty, goodness, such
That none e'er thought her happiness too much ;
So well inclined her favors to confer,
And kind to all as Heaven had been to her.

WALLER.

THE midsummer term was nearly completed. It was a pleasant day in June. Under the shade of a lime-tree avenue sat a girl, making a sketch of the old house at Staunton, its terrace, and the sheet of water beyond it; and near her, stretched on the grass, with *Gertrude of Wyoming* in her hand, lay Gwen. The two could scarcely be called companions, though near enough to exchange speech with each other if they wished; but Dora Biddulph was engrossed with her drawing, and Gwen, if engrossed with Dora, desired to give no evidence of this fact; only she could not help raising her eyes from her book, and gazing on her long and earnestly at times.

'So beautiful and bland,' she repeated from the poem. 'How well those words may be applied to Dora! How inapplicable are they to Geraldine!'

A comparison between the two was commonly instituted by their companions. Before Geraldine arrived, Dora reigned undisputed Queen of Beauty, enthroned by others, unambitious of a sceptre herself. When former scholars flocked together on their return and discussed new comers, Clara Ford announced, in that peculiar tone which always left her companions half in doubt whether she were laughing at or with them, that the handsomest and the ugliest girl who had

ever entered Staunton were arrived: 'Yes, Dora, handsomer than you are, and uglier than—let me see—I must of course in common civility (the rules of which I plead guilty to having violated in my passing remark to Dora), except the present company—well then—uglier than Miss Orme, our little English assistant last half. What else they will prove, time will show; further I pronounce not than that there is plenty of pride in the aquiline features of the one, and some genius in the dark eye of the other; both of which, I opine, will tend to disturb our loving harmony and our indolent peace.' But although Geraldine's beauty had startled all, many, having grown familiar with it, returned to their old creed that no one could be so lovely as Dora. Her features, it was true, were not more finely formed than Geraldine's; her figure, if as graceful, was less commanding; and her complexion, though soft and delicate, was less brilliant than her rival's. Her large hazel eyes had in them a depth of love and kindness; and her smile, breaking into dimples diffused sweetness round her mouth. When grave, the serenity on her beautiful brow could only be the reflection of peace within, and which spread peace around her. To gaze on her face was like looking on an untroubled lake in the cloudless sunshine of noonday, not in the bright promise of morning, or the pensive shade of evening. There seemed too much happiness to admit of hope or regret. Contentment, sympathy, were the predominant expressions of her countenance; and Gwen, as she now gazed, appeared to drink in her fill of satisfaction,—a feeling which proceeded not solely from the contemplation of the agreeable object before her, but from the inward conviction which gave rise to these thoughts: 'How lovely she is, and what unmixed delight I can take in her loveliness! Ah! yes; now I feel sure of myself. Sometimes I have dreaded lest Geraldine's beauty and brightness were in any degree the cause of the estrange-

ment between us. No. I perceive now that where I most admire, there too can I love most. I am not envious.' And this conviction, too strong to be hereafter shaken, was full of unspeakable sweetness to Gwen.

It is not possible for one human eye to be long fixed on another without attracting it. Dora paused in her drawing, pushed back her silken tresses, as glossy as a raven's wing, and cast an involuntary glance on Gwen.

'What is it that pleases you so much, Gwen?' she asked.

Gwen, since she left her home, had grown less demonstrative, more constrained than she naturally was; but at this moment she relinquished all guarded coldness, and resolved to yield to the impulse to give a free expression to the feelings of her heart. She rose and came to Dora's side, knelt down by her, and looking, not at her drawing, as Dora expected, but up in her face, said: 'The sight of you; that is what pleased me, Dora.'

The expression of genuine love and admiration which beamed in her eyes as she said these words, surprised and touched Dora, whose sole reply was to bend forward and give her a kiss. This Gwen read rather as an act of kindness than affection. Perhaps she was right. Her heart swelled within her. 'How very much I love her,' she thought, 'and how little she guesses it! What wonder? Every one loves her—according to their own power of loving—and why should she value what I have to give?' The gleam of delight quite faded from Gwen's face. Dora saw the change, and took her hand. She had often suspected that Gwen was not very happy, and was a little lonely, though she had her cousin, and Dora's kind heart had wished to draw nearer to hers than it had ever yet done. She would make the attempt now, and in so doing must not startle her.

'Come, Gwen,' she said, with gentle playfulness,

‘your looks and your words are a riddle to me, and one I have a fancy to read. You were pleased just now, and already the pleasure has passed away. If I furnished you enjoyment, it has been very short-lived.’

Gwen pressed her hand, and tears trembled in her eyes; for, frigid and immovable at times, she could also be surprised into the liveliest emotions.

‘How could looking at me excite that pleasure? I thought it was something in your book—’

‘Oh! no, no—it was as I said. I was watching you and admiring your beauty, and then I felt such delight, such comfort in perceiving how I could love and admire it. But you can’t understand.’

‘Can’t I? Can’t you make me?’

‘I will try,’ said Gwen, after a pause. ‘At times I have felt afraid, Dora, that I had not a nature generous enough to rejoice in another’s beauty. Geraldine was the most beautiful person I had ever seen till I came here, and I did not rejoice in hers. I have heard people say plainly sometimes, and insinuate at others, that ugly women are likely to envy beautiful ones. I am ugly—I should like to be beautiful. I was afraid I might be envious, unknown to myself; but now you have convinced me that it is not that—and I am very thankful.’

‘Dear Gwen! who could ever have suspected you of such a fault?’

‘I myself—sometimes—before I knew you, but now no more. Is not that comfort?’ And Gwen’s face brightened again.

‘But,’ said Dora, earnestly, ‘there is not one of us that has not base, ungenerous feelings sometimes.’

‘Yes, and it grieves our pride to know this; and there is a wide difference between the pride that is stung to the quick by the discovery of them, and the penitence that mourns over their existence,’ said Gwen, thoughtfully. ‘I know all that, but I don’t think I am deceiving myself here. I am sure that I can love

one like you, and sure that it is not envy that has prevented my ever feeling a like tenderness towards *her*. Let me rejoice in the capacity you have revealed to me, Dora.'

'But the sadness that followed so soon?' asked Dora.

'Why, I was thinking how valueless my love is to you; it is *my* treasure, not yours. I don't mean to speak of your returning it; it would be folly in you to give me back what I give. There is nothing in me to stir up the sentiments which you awaken. Who is there that does not love you? and you may choose from the best—'

'Oh! Gwen,' cried the simple-hearted Dora, 'you ought to put all this into the verses which I know that you write. It is not a bit like anything but poetry.'

'There!' said Gwen, and her whole countenance darkened; 'I knew it—I knew if I ever foolishly spoke half there is in my heart, this is how it would be—people would think me mad, or not in earnest. Yes, it is just like that German story—of the man who has gold that he dug in fairy land, and when he pulls it out to pay mortals, it all turns to bits of flint, and copper, and glass—all rubbish—all useless—all despised!'

'I see what you mean,' replied Dora, with soothing sweetness; 'it is my stupidity—I know that. I always have recognised that I am not clever enough for you, Gwen; and now let me whisper a little secret in your ear. I always have been afraid of you till now. It is a real pleasure to me to hear you talk of loving me; all my fear went away at those words. And I begin to fancy, too, that if you really love me, I *may* be able to make you happier, Gwen, than sometimes you seem to be.'

'Do I seem unhappy? do I make you afraid of me? I thought they feared me at Lascelles, because I knew more than they did; but here—'

‘Oh! it is not that,’ replied Dora; ‘don’t be vexed—but you have at times an odd, dry manner, and as if you were even secretly angry, though no one knows exactly why; and you say things—I can’t describe them. Clara Ford is always turning us into joke, but we are not afraid of her—’

‘Because she is only fond of the ridiculous, and just for the sake of laughing; and I—I am sarcastic,’ said Gwen.

‘Oh! no, not sarcastic,’ exclaimed Dora, looking terribly alarmed at such a hard word.

‘Yes, I have a biting tongue—when I choose,’ continued Gwen.

‘Oh! but, Gwen, don’t choose,’ said Dora, laying her hand tenderly on her arm; ‘it is not right—it is not like Christ.’

After the utterance of that solemn name the girls kept silence awhile. Then Gwen, in a low voice, said: ‘I do pray that my tongue may be kept with bit and bridle. Will you pray for me?’

‘Indeed I will,’ returned Dora, her face beaming with a heaven-born expression of love and charity. ‘It is so kept, I am sure—I have observed, we all have—wonderful instances of forbearance and of self-command in you since you came here. It is very nice to see you with your cousin. You never flatter her, yet you will not join in a laugh against her when she behaves absurdly. You never take upon yourself for knowing so much more than she, or indeed, any of us know. You help her often enough, I am sure, and never boast or take advantage of it after.’

‘I owe a great debt of gratitude to Geraldine’s family and to herself,’ replied Gwen, ‘and I will not easily be turned aside from paying it. But do you mean that this is what you, all of you, think, and do you believe that Geraldine thinks any of it?’

‘I am sure that we think it; and as to Geraldine, she is fond of you in her way, I really believe, and she does not seem to know when she galls you.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Gwen, ‘and I hope I do not often flinch now.’

‘Oh! but this is very bad,’ cried Dora; ‘if you could once speak plainly together, then you might each give up whatever annoys the other, and both would be so much happier.’

Gwen shook her head. ‘You don’t know—it has gone on for years now—and then, no one ever does speak plainly to Geraldine except one—’

‘Who is that one?’

‘Her nurse. She speaks plainly to every one—to Geraldine—to Geraldine’s mother—to me; but then she can—’

‘Why? What do you mean?’

‘I mean,’ said Gwen, after a pause, ‘that when Catherine speaks the truth, she speaks it in love—and I, if I allow myself to speak it at all, am very apt to speak in anger.’

‘Ah! that is it,’ observed Dora, pensively. Gwen could not resent this acquiescence. It humbled her. ‘But it need not always be so,’ added Dora, hopefully. ‘You are growing older, more patient; by degrees you will be better able to speak to Geraldine as a friend, and she seems to need one. Poor girl, if it be with her as you say, what a pity it is that she has turned so much more to Henrietta Smart than to any one else since she has come here! Surely she is of all the least worthy to be her companion. I suppose it is because she is used to flattery. There is Gertrude Markham—well deserving her name—(‘perfect truth,’ you know, it means)—so frank, so upright, looking every one in the face, and never supposing but that they intend precisely what they say—’

‘Yes,’ replied Gwen, ‘once or twice she has taken Geraldine at her word, and completely discomfited her. That is the last way to take her—’

‘I believe it would be the best,’ said Dora. ‘Then there is Clara, who seemed to amuse her very much at first—’

‘But she never supposed that Clara was to take the liberty of laughing at her just as much as at others.’

‘And Augusta Clare, who is very good-natured; but I think she grew a little tired of waiting on Geraldine; and Adelaide Gordon—so pretty, so lady-like, so quiet, so very fair and just always.’

‘Yes, but quite able to hold her own in her gentle way. She has no idea of letting Geraldine encroach, or win by storm or sunshine her cloak from her—you know that fable, Dora? The greatest disgrace that I ever got into with Catherine was through drawing a picture of Geraldine, first coaxing, then threatening. Catherine took it from me and burnt it.’

‘How did you bear that?’

‘Sullenly, at first; but I knew she was quite right. You see, I thought my composition so very clever, that I did not like to watch it shrivelling on the coals.’

‘Any one of the girls we have mentioned is far superior to Henrietta Smart. She really is a mean, sly girl, and Mrs. Damer would not, I think, be sorry to part with her.’

‘There they are now on the terrace,’ said Gwen; ‘I hope they don’t see us.’

‘Oh! Gwen, we must make Geraldine welcome if she comes. How are we to win her from Henrietta if we don’t?’

Gwen felt that she could not make her welcome at that moment.

‘Geraldine is worthy of better things,’ said Dora, earnestly.

Gwen did not answer.

‘Surely you see that there is a great deal in Geraldine?’ asked Dora, anxiously.

‘Of what?’

‘Of that which is fine and interesting,’ said Dora.

‘I suppose there is,’ replied Gwen, slowly. ‘Catherine loves her very much—much more than she loves me.’

‘Is Catherine fair to you?’ asked Dora, quickly.

‘Perfectly,’ was Gwen’s prompt reply. ‘The best friend I have.

‘I am very glad to hear that. How good for you?’

‘Very.’

‘But, Gwen, if Catherine love Geraldine so well, try to find out why.’

‘Oh! I know many reasons why—she loves her mother very much—she loved her sister very much—and she loves Geraldine herself—and Geraldine’s behaviour to Catherine is very different from her conduct towards almost every one else.’

‘And it is not for the sake of flattery that she makes that difference?’

‘Catherine can’t flatter.’

‘Well, then there must be a great deal of good in Geraldine, or she would not love Catherine, nor Catherine her. But what of her sister—poor thing! has she lost one?’

‘Yes, some years ago; before I came to her; a child so fit for heaven! Catherine often speaks to me of her. She says that Mary’s room was like a little chapel in the house, a spot to which every one went to calm each violent feeling, and to drive away each vain and worldly thought; that to draw near to her bed-side was an involuntary prayer. May I tell you about her?’

‘Oh! do—but to have lost one like that. Alas! poor Geraldine!’

As Dora said these words, Geraldine stood beside them. ‘Poor Geraldine!’ she cried, in an indignant tone; ‘poor Geraldine! Don’t think that I have been listening to your talking—Henrietta might do that—not I—I stole along, Dora, to look over your shoulder at your drawing, and surprise you. I never thought that you would be speaking of me. Gwen, you are a little viper, to come here away from our home—and make me to be pitied by your stories!’

‘Her eyes flashed—and,

Oh! what a deal of scorn looked beautiful

In the contempt and anger of her lip.

Gwen started up, and burst into tears : ‘ Oh ! Dora, a viper !’

Dora was older than either of the girls ; she was eighteen. With all the sweetness and dignity natural to her, she took Geraldine’s hand. ‘ Geraldine,’ she said, ‘ you will be sorry for those words. She was going to tell me of Mary, and I said, ‘ Poor Geraldine, to have lost such a sister.’ ’

Geraldine gazed wildly on Dora for a moment ; shame for her mistaken violence, grief at the sound of her sister’s name, both appeared on her countenance. Gwen had sunk down on the grass again. Geraldine threw herself beside her, buried her face on her neck, and sobbed : ‘ Forgive me ! Gwen.’

Dora, kneeling by them, placed their hands in each other, and, in a low whisper, as the passionate sobs of both subsided, she said :

‘ May she go on with what she was saying, Geraldine ?’

Geraldine made a sign of assent, and Gwen, with a strong effort at self-command, for the sake of compliance with the wish of Dora, began in a low voice, to repeat the chief of what she had ever heard from Catherine respecting Mary, the sufferer and the saint. A holy and a softening influence had the simple narration of these facts on the three girls, who were thus engaged in their consideration. Never had there been so much of gentleness, humility, and love in the hearts of the cousins as when they moved slowly towards the house at Dora’s side, each regarding her with reverence, as one actuated by the same spirit which had animated Mary, and rendered by it so infinitely superior to themselves. Each felt, that not since they had been at Staunton had they spent one of their afternoon holidays so happily or so profitably as that one with Dora.





CHAPTER XV.

How oft, oh thou compassionate, must thou mourn
Over the wayward deeds, the thoughts of pride,
That thy pure eyes behold.

Poems by F. A. BUTLER.

‘OH! Geraldine,’ said Gwen, to her cousin, when they were alone, ‘how very glad I am that you did not happen to bring Henrietta Smart with you to-day; we should never have had the peace and comfort we enjoyed with Dora if she had been there—she has a strange art of creating and keeping up misunderstandings. Besides, we never could have made her our companion in what we talked of. How different with Dora! Did you not feel, I am sure I did, as if a dear familiar friend were with us both! I know what Dora thinks of that sort of feeling.’

‘What?’ asked Geraldine, quickly.

‘She thinks,’ replied Gwen, after a thoughtful pause, ‘that in the fellowship of Christians there is no strangeness; that when hearts meet in communion about high and holy things—you know what I mean, Geraldine, such things as we thought and spoke of to-day,—it makes very little difference whether they have or have not met in familiar intercourse before.’

‘But,’ said Geraldine, musingly, ‘if I had been told this morning that I could have talked thus with Dora and you before night, I should not have believed it.’

‘I wish that you always had been more with Dora, and less with Henrietta.’

‘Now, Gwen, I can’t credit that. You like being with her yourself, and I am sure you have not wanted me!’

Geraldine spoke with a little indignation, as well as incredulity in her tone. The perverseness of years was strong in her. She felt that Gwen and Dora were trying to influence her. From Dora she could bear this pretty well, but not so well from her cousin. ‘Gwen is imitating Dora, and a little overdoing her softness,’ flashed through her haughty mind. Gwen was silent; Geraldine’s manner had wounded her, but that was not all. Something within whispered that while in words she called Geraldine to come and share with her what she held as an inestimable treasure and a delight such as she had rarely tasted—communion with Dora—in heart she could scarcely bring herself to breathe ‘a full, free wish,’ to gain her to acquiescence. Gwen laid her head on her pillow, harassed by this self-reproach.

‘What would Dora think of me if it could enter her mind to imagine that I do not fully participate in her generous zeal to do Geraldine good? that, absorbed in myself, I covet her love, and cannot bear to have it in any measure diverted from me? Ah! if she knew all this, she would pity me as she does Geraldine, and desire to infuse purer motives, higher thoughts, into my mean, unworthy heart.’

Considering thus, Gwen fell asleep, and in the morning, the first self-question was: ‘Can I share Dora with Geraldine?’

While she was dressing she began, however, to perceive that the answer she gave to this question was important only to herself. She could not enforce any restricting rule on Dora’s free love, and bid her seek her and abandon Geraldine to Henrietta. ‘So then,’ she murmured, tears starting to her eyes, which she dashed away with angry shame, ‘I have always to give way to Geraldine at every moment. She can snatch from me whatever I value, and have carefully sought

for. I must hide my treasures, or resign them to her. This is ever so—'

'No,' said conscience, 'it is not so here. It was Dora's own choice to welcome Geraldine—not merely that Geraldine rushed in to win her from me. And Dora will not be able so much as to conceive what I mean by such feelings as irritate and vex me now. I don't understand them myself. There is something wrong, I know, yet I don't feel as if I could either conquer or escape from it. I am quite sure that I am not obeying the injunction 'to love one another with a pure heart, fervently.'

Gwen knelt down, and prayed, and rose up with a resolution to reveal to Dora precisely what she did feel, and to ask her assistance in examining how far such feelings must have a debasing effect, a tendency to separate one subject to them from such purified and elevated natures as Mary's, as Catherine's, as her own.

Fortunately the day was Sunday; otherwise, the ordinary routine of the school might not have allowed Gwen any opportunity of conversing with Dora apart, and to speak a few hurried, interrupted words might only have been a groundwork of misunderstanding and mischief. As it was, Gwen had cause to fear that she should miss the occasion for which she watched, for Dora had risen up full of the warm hearty desire to break the chain of habit rather than of feeling which united Geraldine to Henrietta, anxious to strike

'While on the stithy glowed the steel,'

and not to lose any ground gained on the preceding day. Geraldine, she saw, was somewhat disposed to keep aloof, a little too proud, perhaps, to make advances, but Dora's sweet cordiality put such reluctance to flight; they were soon engaged in conversation with each other, and ended by walking side by side to church. Gwen followed behind, silent, abstracted, ungracious. She could not listen to her com-

panion. She could not talk herself. Dora thought that her friend must share her own happy feelings, and, fortunately, Gwen's veil concealed her anything but happy face as the girls passed, one by one, up the seat appropriated to them in the church.

Gwen strove to maintain a mastery over herself, and her honest struggle was not without its reward. She grew calmer, more contrite, more loving, able to embrace a larger circle of affection, and to look further beyond the little present. She remained steadfast to her design of speaking frankly to Dora the first moment that she could, but the uncertain arrival of that moment—the probability of disappointment and interruption just when she should think it secured—harassed her and filled her with a feverish impatience. Then she tamed herself—cooled herself down again. She thought of Jeremy Taylor's simile of the lark, when he is speaking of such as under the influence of outward circumstances, 'pray to God with a troubled and discomposed spirit.'

'For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upward, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds. But the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and unconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the vibration and frequent weighing of his wings; till the little creature was forced to sit down, and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion from an Angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below. So is the prayer of a good man. When his affairs have required business, and his business was matter of discipline—his duty met with infirmities of a man—and then his prayer was broken, and his thoughts were troubled, and his words went up towards a cloud, and his thoughts pulled them back again, and made them

without intention, and the good man sighs for his infirmity, but must be content to lose the prayer.'

Thus did Gwen feel herself sorely buffeted, and blown hither and thither out of her heavenward course. At this moment the high tones of Geraldine's voice and the sweet but less powerful notes of Dora struck her ear, mingling in strains of peace and love; they seemed soaring together, mutually bearing each other up in that serene æther to which she could not reach.

'And would I separate them—break this beautiful and holy bond? How miserably wrong-hearted must I be!' Gwen bowed down her head over her book. None saw the scalding tears that fell and blistered the words which her swimming eyes permitted her not to discern; the blot remained, and long afterwards Gwen would look at that page, and reflect on the moment of their falling.

The girls returned home in the order in which they had come, and Gwen could not refrain from inwardly uttering, in her vexation, 'All her interest is transferred from me to Geraldine. I am not so dull as to overlook that. Shall I, then, speak to her of myself, and gain at best from pity to-day what yesterday I won from love?'

At this moment Dora, passing, laid her hand lightly on Gwen's; that gentle pressure caused an entire revolution in Gwen's feelings:

'I don't deserve her tenderness and consideration! but she shall learn how little I deserve it. I will wear no veil to her. She shall know me as well as I know myself, and if she love me, shall be aware of what she loves.'

No one could be more different than Gwen as she went and as she returned. Her step was lighter; she felt that she had been ungracious to the honest Gertrude, who observed with surprise the ready interest and animation with which she now conversed.

'Had you a headache this morning?' she asked.

‘No,’ said Gwen ; ‘I will tell you the truth, Gertrude—I had a temper-ache.’

Gwen would not now dignify her dissatisfaction with any finer name, and Gertrude laughed at the frankness of the avowal.

‘Well, I must assure you that you are a far more agreeable companion since it has taken its departure.’

And the girls talked gaily to each other all the way home.

Gwen was in the corridor which intersected the chambers, and involuntarily lingered as she reached Dora’s door, but she heard her step coming, and would neither stop nor turn. Dora was at her side, and threw her arm round her :

‘Dear Gwen, I liked to hear your voice with Gertrude ; it sounded cheerful, and I thought we were all happy to-day.’

Gwen gave a nervous twitch, and turned away her head. ‘I wish I could be with you for a little, Dora,’ she said.

‘Well, so you can,’ cried Dora, throwing open her door. ‘Come in here.’

Gwen had too much decision of character to waste any of the moments which she prized. She knew exactly what she wanted to say to Dora, and did not wait for her to ask.

‘You were happy, Dora. Your goodness, your sweet temper makes you so ; but I cannot be happy because I am not like you—not like anything I ought to be, and I can’t bear that you should think me the least better than I am. I must tell you what wrong bad feelings I have, and how miserable they make me.’ She stopped short, checked by the expression of surprise and distress on Dora’s face. ‘I see,’ she added, ‘it is very cruel to disturb your peace, to turn your thoughts out of their pleasant course into my troubled, perplexed, fretted current. Ah ! I am very selfish, for I never thought till now how painful it would be

to you to see that where you have been thinking of nothing but good, there is so much evil.'

'I am sorry,' replied Dora, 'very sorry to find you vexed, when I thought that you were happy and hopeful about Geraldine, and glad that yesterday had made us understand each other—'

'But you don't understand me, Dora.'

'Don't I?' replied Dora, sadly. 'I am sorry for that. I wanted to be a comfort to you.'

Gwen threw her arms round her neck: 'Dear, dearest Dora, I have never had comfort equal to what you have given me except in my own home. But I am afraid it will be no comfort to you to know me better. I am afraid it can only be to love me less. Perhaps you will think it better for us both to have no more to do with each other.'

'Now, Gwen,' said Dora, raising her face, with one of her sweetest smiles, 'you are not in earnest.'

'I am,' returned Gwen, mournfully. 'You will find that I have a most unhappy faculty of turning to poison what ought to be good wholesome food, and if that be the case I ought to be deprived of it.'

'It sounds plausible; but go on, and let me hear,' said Dora, playfully.

'I was very happy with you yesterday, only wishing all the while that no one else would come near us. I was very happy still, however, when, after Geraldine's coming, all ended so peacefully. Oh! I would not, I am quite sure, I would not for the world that Geraldine should not have come, and that we should not have held that conversation about Mary. I was happy as we walked home together—but afterwards—last night—this morning—I cannot conceal from myself what I felt—' She stopped.

'What did you feel?'

'That I could not give you up to Geraldine,' replied Gwen, passionately; 'that I could not cede the place which I hoped I had gained in your heart. Many and

many a time have I been forced to yield to her—things she never thought of till my enjoyment of them brought them into her notice ; and here again was she to be my rival ?

‘ Oh ! Gwen, it was not rivalry that was in our hearts yesterday as we walked homewards !’

‘ No,’ said Gwen ; ‘ these stormy feelings had not risen up within me then. But afterwards—yes, now’—and she looked hopeless and miserable.

Dora threw her arms round her, kissed her tenderly, soothed her with silent caresses, did not loose her from her embrace till she was soothed, and then, in a low, sweet voice, she said :

‘ Are not you *sure* that I love you, Gwen ?’

Gwen’s only answer was an earnest kiss.

‘ I thought,’ continued Dora, ‘ that there could not be a firmer bond of union, a safer seal to our love than joining together to do good to a sister—’ Gwen only pressed closer to her, and thought of the injunction to which Dora was yielding obedience :

‘ Who art thou that wouldst grave thy name
Thus deeply in a brother’s heart ?
Look on this Saint, and learn to frame
Thy love charm with true Christian art. . . .
No fading frail memorial give
To soothe his soul when thou art gone,
But wreathes of hope for aye to live,
And thoughts of good together done.’

‘ Besides,’ said Dora, gently, ‘ I thought I owed a sort of debt to Geraldine ; I felt some self-reproach, as it were, about her. When first she came, I am afraid we all deemed her too proud—a little impertinent, perhaps ; we were none of us used to that sort of conduct, and I fear we did not take it in the right way altogether. I think that she even singled me out, and if I had responded to her preference, or whatever it was, she might never have grown so intimate with Hen-

rietta. This seems very conceited,' cried Dora, breaking off and blushing; nor would she add that she had been chiefly disinclined to meet Geraldine's advances by dislike to her behaviour to Gwen herself. 'I am sorry now, but perhaps it is not yet too late.'

'Oh! no, no, let us hope not,' cried Gwen, with ardour; 'forget my past unworthiness, dearest Dora, and let me at least try to work at your side.'

And Gwen, who never again knew a fear that Dora's affection for her would suffer diminution through the warmth of her interest in Geraldine, was thenceforward her zealous co-operator, and gradually acquired a greater generosity of sentiment than on this point she at first manifested. Was it likely, then, that she should lose ground in Dora's heart? In fact, the two girls were peculiarly calculated to contract a very intimate and constant friendship. The gentle, sympathising, humble-minded Dora could understand the somewhat morbid sensibility of Gwen's imaginative character, and was neither deeply wounded nor incensed by the shafts of satire which she could not refrain from sometimes levelling at her dearest companions. If they pricked Dora, the place did not rankle, but healed again in a moment. Not gifted with any remarkable talents herself, she had sufficient intelligence to derive very great pleasure from the endowments of others. She loved to look up to, to admire, to venerate. She did not covet nor contend; she thought too little of herself to feel a wish to appropriate the gifts of others. She was happy enough in ministering to their possessors.

'I do hope, Dora,' said Gwen, one day, 'that you will never marry any but a great genius. However irritable, however egotistical he may be, you will be able to bear it. You won't even be conscious that you are bearing anything; and if he occasionally breaks out into expressions of gratitude and self-reproach, you won't know what he means. Oh! you are born to be

the wife of a genius—to humour all his caprices, and still more, to understand all his heart craves for—to read all his moods—’

‘Thank you,’ replied Dora, laughing. There was a whisper in her heart which she did not communicate even to Gwen’s ear: ‘A very great genius—well, certainly, he is that—but irritable, selfish—oh! no. Well, Gwen, what are you thinking of more?’

‘Why, that when you meet with such an one, and give him all your heart, you will have none left for me, and I shall hate him,’ replied Gwen, as much or more in earnest than in jest.

‘Oh! no, I don’t think you can hate him,’ replied Dora, eagerly; then, checking herself, she added, gently, ‘I shall love you on to the end, and why should you hate any one dear to me?’

Dora was so very simple in her manners and tastes, so very unassuming, that even Henrietta Smart, who was desirous to form an aristocratic circle of friends, and looked on the opportunity of doing so afforded her at Staunton as the one great advantage she derived from being a scholar there,—was perpetually in danger of forgetting that of all Mrs. Damer’s young ladies, Miss Biddulph stood foremost in high birth and rank;—far above the wealthy merchant’s adopted daughter, Geraldine Eustace.

Dora did not find it too late to conciliate Geraldine and to win her love, and how could she not be the better for loving Dora? But, unfortunately, after the midsummer vacation Dora Biddulph was to return no more. The knowledge of this fact made Geraldine often assert, to the great discomfort of Gwen, that she should not come back either.

‘Surely, Geraldine, you had much better stay another half-year,’ said Dora. ‘You will not be seventeen till March.’

‘You are speaking for Gwen, not for me, Dora. What good will it do me to be here, when you are gone? I learn very little but what you teach me

you know. But don't make yourself unhappy about my cousin. I can settle anything for her that I like, and if she desire another half she shall have it. I wish you would come to us at Lascelles, Dora. I want mamma to see you, and you to see mamma. You are the two most loveable people in the world. Now,' said Geraldine, reddening as she spoke, 'if Gwen does not love her, she must be very cold-hearted—ungrateful—'

'But she does—I am sure she does; she has often told me how very kind, and lovely, and loveable your mother is,' cried Dora, eagerly.

Geraldine looked only half-satisfied.

'I doubt if she loves her enough,' she said.

Great was Geraldine's delight in returning to her mother; and Mrs. Faulkner, of course, thought no endeavours to please and amuse her could be too lavish, and, in all respects, did her utmost to obliterate any traces of the stricter school-discipline to which her daughter had been for awhile subjected. Geraldine was soon as mutinous as ever, and carried the point on which her heart was most set—that she should return to Staunton no more.

Gwen went to her own home. Hugh had now kept some terms at Oxford, and her ambition was fired for him as well as for herself. He had terminated a most creditable career at Winchester, and, reaping the fruits of his exertions, had now won many honours. He rejoiced, and led Gwen to rejoice with a purer, higher feeling than that of ambition,—a flame their mother had never fanned. Mrs. Owen communicated to Gwen that she was invited by the relations of a lady much out of health, to accompany her to Madeira, to pass the winter,—a proposal intended for the benefit of each, and which awakened in her some hope of regaining a portion of her own exhausted strength. The question was whether Lascelles could still be the home of Gwen for six months longer. No sooner did Mrs. Faulkner understand these circumstances, than she promptly pro-

posed to send Gwen to Staunton till Christmas, and begged that Hugh would join her at Lascelles during the winter vacation, adding that Gwen must, after his departure, remain with her until Mrs. Owen's return and establishment in the home which she contemplated in London, as soon as her daughter should be restored to her. These generous offers were accepted by the Owens with sincere gratitude.





CHAPTER XVI.

Things which abide nearest the fountain spring
Of our affections cannot bear the light
Of common day, but shrink at ruder sight.

Thoughts in Past Years.

CHRISTMAS came, and Gwen took leave of Staunton for ever. After the midsummer vacation she had returned there alone, freed from Geraldine's plaguing, deprived of Dora's sympathy, at least, of its daily, hourly expression. She supplied this loss as well as she could, by a full and frequent correspondence with her friend, in which she permitted herself a more unrestrained communication of her feelings than perhaps she had ever put on paper before, for with Dora there were fewer restrictions in force than with her mother, though to her also could she write at this particular period, far more freely than when at Lascelles. Very salutary to Gwen was this temporary release from constraint. It was an unbending of her spirit, a softening at all times needed by her, and perhaps now more than at other seasons, for she was less than ever under the influence of the affections in daily life. On her first return to Staunton, to find Dora no longer there, was to Gwen to sustain a distress which she revealed to none, and which rendered her averse to other companionship, indisposed to contract new intimacies, more uninviting in her deportment than before—she could not desire nor endure to have Dora's place supplied—she would sooner feel her want than allow another to be her substitute. It was only by Dora's own gentle admonitions that she was won

from this sullenness of mood, and brought to welcome demonstrations of kindness from her present companions. But Gwen was not very attractive, and less so when depressed by any inward suffering. Unfortunately, too, she had acquired the habit of living under the expectation of being misunderstood, and without the hope common to youth, of readily and ordinarily exciting love—for the kindness she met with at Lascelles was not the result of individual affection, and she keenly felt the difference. Gwen was generous, willing to serve and to oblige, but shyness and reserve often hindered a manifestation of these sentiments, and when they passed unheeded, because unperceived, she would shrink into herself, wounded and annoyed. But by degrees these qualities came to the knowledge of her companions, and it became a not unfrequent expression among them: ‘Oh! Gwen will help us, she is always ready.’ Gwen’s heart warmed at such words as these, and she rarely disappointed the confidence reposed in her. But it was in the fuller development of her heart in affection for her mother, brother, and friend, that Gwen found safety from an intellectual absorption which might have deadened her sympathies, and involved her in a selfish ambition. Never did she work so hard and so uninterruptedly at her various studies as at this time, and it was a most wholesome refreshment to receive or to write a letter warm from the heart.

Dora, to whom these effusions were new, welcomed them with delight. The force and originality of all that Gwen wrote made her correspondence constantly interesting, but there was also a certain penalty to be paid for the enjoyment of it, for she was not a little *exigante* with her friend, as to reciprocity of sentiment, and a free and speedy expression of it. She told Dora that she could disregard from others shortcomings that she would not endure from her. ‘You must not leave me unsatisfied, unresponded to—others may—I don’t expect or ask from them what I know by per-

ception, by experience, I can extract from you. Therefore, when you do not understand and sympathise with me, it seems as if you wilfully inflicted an injury, and I resent, I cannot tell you how keenly, the wrong I sustain. Is it not Lord Bacon who records a saying, 'We are bidden to forgive our enemies, but we are not bidden to forgive our friends?' This is what I feel in your case, Dora; I cannot forgive, I cannot excuse you, unfortunately, if you fail to render me one particle of the affection I crave.' Thus would Gwen write, if she construed a brief reply as a cold one, or if her patience were tried by unavoidable delay. But Gwen, if irascible, could also repent so fully and freely that a more inflexible judge than Dora would have been prevailed on to pardon; and when reduced to contrition, she had yet one stronghold in which she always found safety:

'You know, Dora, that however much I torment by ill temper, I never have, for a moment, given you ground for suspecting me of growing chilled and changed.' On earth we can possess nothing beyond a mixed good. It would have been better for Gwen had her friend been rather less disposed to indulge her tendency to morbid sensitiveness, and the egotism which is its consequence, and to a certain jealousy which as the accompaniment of extreme affection, in a measure gratified, while it harassed Dora. This sort of hothouse culture of Gwen's sensibilities made her very susceptible of the change to the atmosphere of Lascelles, and was partly the cause of grievous faults as well as of acute suffering. It happened that she arrived there at a moment when no one was free to think much about her. She took refuge in the anticipation of Hugh's coming. That, indeed, was one full of delight and of exultation, for she knew that in some points, and precisely those of which Mrs. Faulkner had a lively appreciation, her brother was as unlike herself as possible. 'Mrs. Faulkner certainly cannot pity mamma for having such a son as Hugh. I know very

well how often she had pitied her for her little plain daughter; here, on the contrary, I dare say she will be moved to envy. No one can dispute that Hugh is handsome, and he has the sort of beauty which Mrs. Faulkner will admire—elegant, refined.’ Secure that Hugh would be approved of, Gwen followed another train of thought, which resulted rather in fear than in hope.

‘Hugh is coming for me,’ she said; ‘Geraldine has her mother, and all the pleasures that mother provides for her. I shall have Hugh, and I shall want nothing else—and Hugh will have me.’ And she felt a half-wish that Geraldine should keep to her lively threat to let her cousin Hugh quite alone.

‘He will be much too learned for me. I wish, Gwen, you and he would talk Latin together. It would be improving for you, and I should feel total ignorance less than partial.’ To her mother, Geraldine added: ‘I hope that Hugh is not so dreadfully clever as his sister. I am afraid. But if he is a great prig and very tiresome, I need not take any notice of him, you know. Gwen can have him all to herself, and she will like that.’

The day came, the hour approached of Hugh’s arrival, and unobserved, unquestioned, Gwen took her bonnet, and walked down the avenue, and into the drive beyond, intending to look out for him there—to be the first to see and welcome him. ‘Oh! yes,’ she murmured, ‘the very first—I must be that—I would not share that moment even with Catherine, and certainly with no one else.’ Gwen had felt irritated, she scarce knew why, whenever Geraldine had uttered Hugh’s name. She could not bear ridicule on this subject, and yet she feared that if she showed her sensitiveness, Geraldine would make it her delight to tease her and her brother too. She had controlled her feverish impatience all the morning while with Geraldine, and indulged it now by starting off alone to meet

him. Unheeding what she was about, she passed through the last gate of the grounds beyond which neither she nor Geraldine had ever set foot alone, and pursued her way along the high road without even pausing to consider whither it led, or if it were the one by which Hugh must approach. She walked with increasing speed, like one persuaded that every step brought her nearer to a desired object, and fortunately it did so. Thoughts of Dora broke in, and mingling with thoughts of Hugh, created a painful doubt lest many others which she had indulged were such as neither would approve. Their mild looks rose before her, and without losing their mildness, spoke warning and reproof. Gwen stopped short, and asked herself, 'Is it possible that I am in danger of turning this great good now in store for me into evil? Ingratitude to God—that would be—what grief to Hugh, and to me!'

At this moment Gwen heard the sound of approaching wheels—Hugh might pass her by, not expecting to see her there; she placed herself in the centre of the road, and stopped the driver by raising her hand; she could not speak, her voice failed her. Hugh looked from the window with astonishment and pleasure: 'You here, Gwen! you look pale—you can scarcely stand—jump in, and drive back. You are quite knocked up, my dear little sister.'

He was at her side. 'No, Hugh, no, I am not tired,' she gasped; 'I thought we might walk back together.'

'Walk,' cried Hugh, 'how far is it?'

'A mile, and more, to the gate,' said the driver. 'Had you not better drive?'

'Oh! why!' replied Gwen; 'it will take so much longer to go on foot.' She put her hand on Hugh's arm imploringly; Hugh closed the carriage door, and gave the driver his directions, then drew Gwen's arm within his, and moved slowly on.

'Dear Hugh,' said Gwen, fast recovering, 'I had no

idea where I was, nor how far I had come. I never meant to quit the grounds. I am afraid that I ought not to have done so.'

'No great harm, surely,' replied Hugh; 'and I am here to take you home again. I am only afraid that you have tired yourself.'

'Oh! no,' said Gwen, 'not that.'

And the brother and sister had so much to ask and to tell each other, that the mile and a half seemed but a few yards in length. Gwen sighed as they reached the gate at Lascelles.

'Here we are,' cried Hugh, as he threw it open. 'How much I shall like to see the place where you have passed many years, and the cousins who have been in our stead to you!'

'In your stead, in mamma's stead!' exclaimed Gwen, startled out of her self-command. 'No, no, nobody ever has been, can, or shall be that, though for my mother's sake I would endure all things.' Tears came into her eyes.

'Dear Gwen,' said Hugh, tenderly, 'no doubt you have felt this separation more, far more than I can understand. Boys, men, are accustomed to the sort of thing from the first.'

'I have,' replied the girl, in a choked voice, 'felt the separation, and many things besides.'

'What do you mean, dearest?' asked Hugh, distressed by her manner. 'Surely you have been happy here on the whole?'

'Well,' said Gwen, 'perhaps I have; at any rate, I have certainly had a great deal to be thankful for.'

'But you do love Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine?'

'I hope I do,' replied Gwen; then added, in a livelier tone, 'I will tell you whom I love with all my heart—that is, Catherine Irving.'

'Oh! the nurse—the old servant?'

'If an old servant, she is still a young woman, and 'nurse' only means that she nursed poor Mary Eustace night and day till she died. Were it summer, Hugh,

how beautiful you would think this place. Even in its winter garb it looks well. The hoar frost on these trees yesterday was exquisitely beautiful. It looked really as if all the fairy silversmiths had been at work, and how they must have rejoiced in their labours! But I will take you into the conservatory, and you will think yourself in the midst of summer again. Here we are,' she cried, running up the steps to the hall door, opening it, and leading Hugh rapidly through the fine hall, and the drawing-room furnished with remarkable elegance, into the spacious conservatory beyond; then standing still in the midst of her favourite tropical plants and birds, enjoying her brother's delight, she exclaimed, 'Mrs. Faulkner has given me all the flowers on these shelves, for my own!'

'How very kind!'

'Very,' repeated Gwen, feeling as if she had not recognised this kindness as fully as she ought, till reminded of it by the cordial gratitude of Hugh's tone.

'This is like one of the beautiful palaces in the *Arabian Nights*,' said Hugh. 'We have not yet discovered a living being in it.'

'I suppose they are in the garden,' replied Gwen, in a tone of annoyance.

Hugh seemed desirous to put an end to the few minutes that were to her so delightful. Her brother did not perceive the feelings by which she was influenced. He had neither her keen observation nor morbid tendency, although possessed of delicate sensibility, and the most even temper in the world.

'There they are,' he said; 'two ladies—I see them.'

'We can pass this way into the garden,' replied Gwen, making an effort to vanquish at once a repugnance which she knew to be vain. Hugh must know those who had hospitably invited him into their home, must encounter their fascinations, and would

probably yield to their charm, as she herself had done in the beginning. Then if he departed before the spell was dissolved, he would probably remark her coldness with wonder and displeasure. If he tarried long enough to estimate their characters truly, he must, like her, be content to bend under an oppressive debt of gratitude. Though more than once her language had bordered on that of warning, she abstained from the distinct utterance of any, feeling it ungenerous to teach Hugh to meet with suspicion the kindness which would be lavished on him, unless impeded by caprice or prejudice.

Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine having perceived the approach of the Owens, came to meet them. At first Geraldine had cried, 'Oh ! let us stay here ; they will come to us.'

But her mother either did not hear or did not heed ; and Geraldine, choosing rather to precede than to follow, now advanced, with the prettiest voice and manner imaginable, holding out her hand to Hugh, and saying :

'Are you my cousin, Hugh Owen ? Are you Gwen's brother ? See, mamma ; here is Hugh. Is it not odd ?' And she looked at him with undisguised surprise and approbation.

'Why odd, my dear ?' asked Mrs. Faulkner, laughing. 'Did we not expect him ?'

'We expected—some one not the least like him ; I never thought that an Oxford double first could be anything but a most alarming-looking person, and I fancied that no one who pores over books could be tall and upright. Gwen, are you sure ?—is this Hugh ?'

Hugh coloured, and felt rather shy at these prolonged observations concerning him, but was gratified to perceive that Geraldine was undoubtedly much better pleased with what he was than with what she had expected him to be. On his own part, he had not imagined anything half so beautiful as Geraldine

at this moment looked, glowing with the effect of the fresh, elastic air, and with the excitement of seeing a stranger.

‘Do not be such a silly child,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, drawing Geraldine’s hand within her arm. ‘Hugh is very much like his father when first he joined our family, but still more resembles a sister of Mr. Owen’s, whom I remember once to have seen, but cannot recollect what became of her. She was a beautiful girl. Gwen, I think, was her name.’

‘Yes,’ replied Hugh, ‘my aunt. She is in India. Her husband is a brave and highly esteemed officer—Colonel Campbell.’

‘Gwen,’ repeated Geraldine; ‘Oh! then, you see, Hugh ought to have been Gwen, and Gwen ought to have been Hugh. That would have made it all right.’

Gwen was quite alive to the meaning of this speech, but reading in it the full acknowledgment of her brother’s superior beauty, heard it without displeasure. Hugh, set at ease by Mrs. Faulkner’s kind reception, soon found himself walking up and down the terrace, talking to her with all the ease of relationship. Gwen followed, never weary of looking at him, marking how much he was grown, and charmed to see how frank, yet how graceful his manner was. Geraldine, a little tired of finding herself in the background, ran down a slight declivity at one end of the terrace to the edge of the recently frozen pond, and cried out that she must try whether the ice would bear. Her mother screamed in alarm, but Geraldine was already on it, not a little frightened at her own daring. Hugh hurried to the brink to relieve Mrs. Faulkner’s terror, and to aid Geraldine. As he arrived he heard the ice begin to crack; and the girl, losing all presence of mind, extended her arms, exclaiming, ‘Save me, I shall sink!’ and fell on the surface.

With a little difficulty, Hugh brought her to the

bank, but no sooner did she attempt to walk than she gave a cry of pain, and caught his arm.

‘My dearest child, what have you done?’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, shedding a flood of tears.

‘Broken my leg, I am sure,’ sobbed Geraldine, in return.

‘Twisted your ankle, most likely,’ observed Gwen, promptly. ‘Lean on me as well as on Hugh, and just try to put your foot to the ground.’

‘It is too much pain,’ cried Geraldine, angrily, and sick and half fainting, she leant her head on her mother’s shoulder.

‘You must let me carry you to the house,’ said Hugh, kindly. ‘I can do it very easily; don’t be afraid.’

But Geraldine was very much afraid, and screamed several times before she could be safely laid on the couch which Gwen, who had run on, wheeled close to the door of the conservatory by which they could enter, then hastening away to call Catherine:

‘Do come quickly into the drawing-room. Geraldine fell on the ice, and has sprained her ankle, I think. Mrs. Faulkner is crying, and Hugh has carried her in.’

Catherine was ready with bandages and fomentations in an incredibly short time, and pronounced, without hesitation, that the ankle was strained and the leg not broken.

‘Now, Miss Geraldine, it is of no use to twitch away your foot; I must bind it. What could make you go on the ice?’

‘I wanted something to amuse me, Catherine. Mamma was talking to Hugh—no one was taking any notice of me, and I did it partly to startle them.’

‘Well, you have startled us all, and hurt yourself also,’ said Catherine, drily. ‘You will be badly off for amusement now.’

‘Oh! no, every one must try to entertain me if I

have to lie here long. I am sure they will. I know that mamma will think of nothing else, and I expect nearly as much from Hugh.' And Geraldine turned to him with an appealing smile. 'He was kind and quick enough to save me from slipping under that horrid ice. I heard it crack; it would soon have yawned—would it not?'

'Oh! don't speak of it,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, with a shudder. 'We must all do our best for you, poor dear; but remember you have made us very angry. I have sent for the surgeon, and I sha'n't be happy till he has been here, although I dare say Catherine knows as well as he.'

The surgeon came, and pronounced the strain slight, not likely to confine Miss Eustace to the sofa for more than a week.

'A week!' exclaimed Geraldine. 'What a stupid, tiresome man that is. I shall attend to no one but Catherine. Pray don't let him come again. From the first moment that I saw how tall Hugh was, I made up my mind that we would dance every evening while he was at Lascelles.'

Gwen was extremely active and ready in her attendance on Geraldine, showing presence of mind and common sense. She was a little surprised when alone with Hugh to find that he did not make the slightest comment on the wilfulness which had occasioned Geraldine's accident. He was delighted with Mrs. Faulkner's manner, 'and how beautiful Miss Eustace—Geraldine is!' he said. 'I am sure that your Dora, of whom you have written to me all the while that you were at Staunton, can be nothing like her.'

'Nothing like her,' replied Gwen, proudly. 'As different as possible, indeed. Some people might differ as to which is the handsomest, but, as to the question whether Dora is beautiful or not—just ask Geraldine.'

'I will,' said Hugh; and when they had returned to the drawing-room, and he had seated himself near

the arm of Geraldine's sofa, he did ask her whether Miss Biddulph was the extraordinary beauty that Gwen declared her to be.

'Oh!' cried Geraldine, with animation, 'I believe that is the one point on which Gwen and I do agree; to be sure it is one on which there can be no difference of opinion. Oh, mamma, I wish we had Dora here; I begged her to come, but she only shook her head, and said Christmas must be passed at home. If you could see her—her lovely face—her silken black hair. If you could hear her voice, it is so gentle—so persuasive—'

Gwen smiled: 'Do you think, Geraldine, if she had been by the pond to-day, and had said in her peculiar, low tone, 'Don't, Geraldine,' that you should have gone on it?'

'I can't tell; I felt very mischievous just then, and when I heard mamma scream, I could not help taking a little slide.' She took her mother's hand playfully as she spoke.

'Naughty child! Strange that you should like to torment me!'

'Mamma,' continued Geraldine, with a look of mock awe, 'was it not fortunate for me that Lady Rivers was not in the garden?—nor papa?—but he must know presently. You won't make out a very bad case for me, mother dear, will you?'

Hugh, during this little dialogue between Geraldine and Mrs. Faulkner, had been chiefly engaged in thinking how pleasant it was to hear the former express her generous, cordial admiration of Dora.

'She, indeed, need never fear a rival,' he thought.

It was strange that it did not occur to him at that moment that surely Gwen's enthusiasm about her beautiful friend was therefore more remarkable than Geraldine's.

'Tell me, Hugh, what do you know about Dora?'

'Gwen's letters have been full of her. I also know young Lord St. Ruth, her father's ward, very well. If

he goes abroad for the long vacation, he wants me to go with him as his tutor, and perhaps I shall.'

'Where?'

'To Switzerland.'

'Oh! mamma, let us all go to Switzerland; I should like it so much.'

Mr. Faulkner's step was heard; he entered the room: 'Why, Geraldine, are you ill? What has happened?'

'Nothing very bad,' said Mrs. Faulkner, coming forward to meet her husband. 'Poor child! it was only that she fancied that the ice was hard enough to bear her, and she slipped, and strained her ankle. Mr. Cooke says it is but very little.'

Mr. Faulkner could only be moved to pity by such an account of Geraldine's disaster.

'Owen, my good fellow! have you found your way to Lascelles?—Very happy to see you.'





CHAPTER XVII.

Ne l'examinons point dans la grande rigueur,
Et voyons ses défauts avec quelque douceur.

MOLIÈRE.

THE next day and the next everybody was employed in amusing Geraldine, and she had many wants, and many ways of employing all her subjects. She displayed considerable talent for despotic rule. Gwen evinced as much alacrity as any one at first; the second day, still more the third, she could not smother a hope that when Geraldine should be well again, she herself might have a little more of Hugh's society. Under existing circumstances, perhaps Gwen's pleasantest hour was one passed with Catherine in talking about her brother, and hearing what she thought of him. Gwen had observed, but she did not make known her observation even to Catherine, that during her months of absence at Staunton, her cousin had developed wonderfully from the school-girl into the young lady, and she remembered with a start that Hugh also was no longer a boy—the boy she used to play with. Gwen was fond of saying to herself, 'I am not a child now,' and if she were not a child, neither were others.

The second evening, Geraldine said :

'I really think, Hugh, that if you were to shake up my pillow, fetch me another, then raise me up a little, so as to be supported by them, and next tell Gwen to look for my music, to open the piano, and to play an accompaniment for me, I could sing you a song or

two ; and you really deserve something, for you have been very good to me all day.'

'I have had abundant reward,' replied Hugh ; 'this is the overflowing of your generosity.'

'I was afraid,' said Geraldine, with a very pretty air of penitence, 'that I had been too cross to say one civil word to anybody for their pains all this day. That is why I want to sing, because I can sing sweetly when I speak sourly. You shall judge, if Gwen will be good, and play.'

Gwen was surprised to hear this acknowledgment of the fretfulness and impatience which she had remarked, while Hugh, touched by the tone of self-accusation, denied the justice of it. He listened with unspeakable delight to Geraldine's songs. Elated by his admiration, she went on with increased spirit. Then she wanted to sing one of which Gwen did not know the accompaniment.

'How tiresome ! what nonsense. Gwen, where is the use of your playing so well if you can't read a simple thing like that ?'

'It is not simple, this German accompaniment,' said Gwen ; 'the vocal part may be easy.'

'Do try it, Gwen,' cried Hugh, eagerly. 'You will succeed, I am sure. You really play very well.'

'Have you been able to find that out ?' asked Gwen inwardly, but she silenced the bitter question, while she bent her head over the music for a moment. 'Well, I will try,' she said, looking up. She had conquered.

It was an air of deep pathos which she had to accompany, and while so engaged, she called up Dora's sweet face before her to smile on her in approval ; earnestly and lovingly did she gaze on it, and spoke with her in such music as she could make. Geraldine's voice—her ringing, melodious voice had died away. Gwen went on—with the remaining bars of the accompaniment they supposed, but now she took up the air, and continued a modulation on it of beauty and feeling

that thrilled through all their hearts. They felt too much pleasure to interrupt her by one expression of surprise, until she concluded of her own accord.

‘Why, Gwen,’ exclaimed Geraldine, ‘all that was your own. How beautiful! But if I had not made you begin, you would never have done this—you may all thank me for Gwen’s performance; I hope you will perceive that.’

Gwen trembled, and her cheek was flushed with excitement. Hugh saw how she was moved, and left Geraldine to come to her side. He took one of her hands, and said in a voice meant for her alone: ‘Dear Gwen, how eloquent these fingers are! How you will delight my mother! Have you often played like this before? Can you when you will?’

Gwen looked up, her eyes swimming with tears that half quenched the strange fire which glowed in them. She had not been so happy since Geraldine first shared Hugh with her—taking, as usual, the lion’s share.

‘When I will? Oh, no—but sometimes—I was playing to Dora,’ she said, smiling; and then she thought how very little even Hugh could understand what she meant.

The next morning Hugh approached Geraldine’s sofa, and said:

‘I have planned something that will be good for you; you are not able to walk even to-day; but let me carry you down to the pond in a chair, and put it on the ice. I am going to skate; you can’t think how you will enjoy such a drive as I will give you. The ice is now so frozen that I am sure Mrs. Faulkner cannot have a fear, and I am very safe, indeed I am.’

‘Are you?’ replied Geraldine. ‘At present you stand very high in mamma’s favour. She considers that you saved my life. I don’t; therefore I can’t be expected to feel an equal fervour of gratitude, can I?—But really you did come here just like a hero of romance, snatching me from imminent peril, almost before we had interchanged a word with each other.’

The only proper continuation to such a beginning is that you should fall hopelessly in love with me ; that is *de rigueur*,—of course you have commenced——.’

Geraldine knew that she was going a little too far. She did not quite venture to look Hugh in the face as she ran on, to see how he took it. She would not have hazarded the speech at all if Gwen had been by, and placed, she scarcely knew whether in caution or in malice, a marked emphasis on the word ‘hopelessly.’

Gwen came into the room, and Geraldine exclaimed :

‘I like your plan, immensely. Gwen, I am going on the ice ; run for my bonnet, and all the fur you can find. Hugh is to make a sledge of my chair—it will be charming.’

‘But I never meant that we should go without Mrs. Faulkner’s permission,’ said Hugh, gravely.

‘Quite time enough to seek it when my chair is on the ice,’ replied Geraldine, haughtily ; angry with Hugh for thinking that *he* could ask permission for her to follow her own will. But Hugh was not to be shaken. Not till he had found Mrs. Faulkner, and patiently explained to her that the ice had been hardening night and day, and how much harm it did to Geraldine to be shut up so long,—how anxious she was to try, and how experienced a skater he was,—and had obtained a consent, a reluctant one, ‘wrung from her,’ Mrs. Faulkner said, did he return to carry his fair cousin down to the water.

Geraldine had thrown her cloak upon the floor, her bonnet on the chair, herself on the sofa. She did not wish to stir. She did not intend to go out.

‘Don’t you, really?’ said Hugh, much disappointed. ‘And I have just prevailed with Mrs. Faulkner, chiefly by telling her how much you desired this. She was coming down herself to see us ; and here is Gwen, all ready.’ No, Geraldine thought the skating would be very dull, stupid work.

‘Dull, stupid work, Geraldine !’ cried Gwen. ‘Oh ! no, certainly not that.’

‘Well, then, Gwen,’ said Hugh, with spirit, ‘give me the chair, and come down; you shall try it, and Geraldine can see us from the window.’

Now Geraldine felt quite sure that to watch them from the window could not prove otherwise than very dull, so she rose quickly, put on her cloak, and with a little vestige of *hauteur*, desired Hugh to carry her. The fresh air and the exercise brought back the roses to her cheeks, and good humour to her mind. She was soon full of enjoyment, glowing with health and pleasure. Mrs. Faulkner gazed on her and her young charioteer with admiring eyes, and Gwen could not help sharing the same feeling. Geraldine was safely carried back, and Hugh was again at Gwen’s side.

‘It is your turn, now, Gwen; but why don’t you skate? That is what you would enjoy. I will get a small pair of skates, and teach you.’

The next day Geraldine was able to reach the billiard-room, and played several games with Hugh.

Thus the vacation was passing away day by day, week by week; how swiftly, how enchantingly to Hugh; how tediously, how painfully to Gwen.

At first Gwen argued with herself as to the strange disquietude which harassed her. ‘How odious these sensations are! Is it that I am miserably jealous? Is it because I thought that Hugh came here for me, that I feel this uneasiness? He is never unkind, no—nor neglectful—but everything is different from what I expected. Oh! Lascelles, Lascelles, what an unhappy place you are to me! All that is sweet in itself seems to turn to gall, and all that is good to evil. I doubt whether I could enjoy even Dora’s society; and as to my mother—not for worlds would I have her here—she would feel too much for her poor Gwen, as none ever have felt for her. One glance of hers would discover the secret of years, and force me to lay bare the wounds I have stanchd without ever betraying their existence.’

But Gwen soon grew convinced that her vision was not distorted by any selfish consideration, when it told her that Geraldine was using every means in her power in order to fascinate Hugh, and 'thought-sick,' heart-sick was the sister to see him gradually beguiled of his affection by Geraldine's newly-developed coquetry.

'There is nothing but vanity in this; how can he be so weak as to suppose otherwise? He may empty his heart of happiness for his whole life long, and what return will he obtain but mockery from her, and coldness and contempt from her parents? Can he have so little knowledge of the world as to look round on all this splendour, see Geraldine the reputed heiress of it (for whom else has Mr. Faulkner to turn to), and believe that she will reject the yet untasted cup of pleasure which is brimming over for her, to realize his romantic dreams? Or would he, rich in gifts of intellect as she is in those of beauty and fortune, renounce the honourable career before him, to live here her contented slave, receiving from her parents the very bread he eats? What can he contemplate? What is here for him to hope? What is there not for him to fear? Or rather, for me to fear for him? If he could but know her better—see her as she is—he must then recognise how incapable she would be of making his happiness, even were she willing to try. He is quite dazzled by her. I heard him yesterday reject with disdain those lines of which he used to be fond:

'A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food.'

That is not Geraldine, certainly; nor do I think the character described in them would satisfy Hugh, and I am not surprised. I should not wish it. Dora far surpasses them. But what has become of all his musings and his love for Una, for Griselda, for the Lady Custance? I never hear him speak of them now. He

dares not talk of them to her. She would laugh him to scorn. What would she make of lines like these?—

‘In hir is high beauté withouten pride,
 Youthe withouten greenhed or folie,
 To all hir workés vertue is hir guide,
 Humblesse hath slaien in hir tyrannie.
 She is mirrour of alle courtesie.’

Or these of Griselda:

‘In hir great estate
 Hir ghost was ever in pleine humilitie;
 No tendre mouth, no herte delicate,
 No pompe, no semblant of realitee,
 But ful of patient benignitee,
 Discreet and prideles, ay honorable,
 And to hir husband ever meke and stable.’

And as to Una, she would understand her just as little. Geraldine cannot enter into that which ‘makes a sunshine in a shady place.’

These thoughts passed through Gwen’s mind, while her eyes were mournfully following her brother, as he paced up and down the terrace, book in hand. If Hugh had seldom appeared to think or read lately of ‘heavenly Una and her milk-white lamb,’ or of patient Griselda, (or perhaps thought with a sigh, and abstained from reading because of a regret) he had fallen on a volume in the library of Spenser’s sonnets, which seemed to describe Geraldine in all her wondrous beauty admirably; and now with Gwen’s eye upon him, was he repeating, with occasional breaks, either to follow his own fancies more freely, or because the poet said something not in unison with them, a passage here and there which had become a favourite with him; as this:

‘Fair is my love when her fair golden hairs
 With the loose wind ye waving chance to mark;
 Fair when the rose in her red cheek appears,

Or in her eyes the fire of love doth spark.
Fair when her breast like a rich laden bark,
With precious merchandize she forth doth lay.
Fair when that cloud of pride that oft doth dark
Her goodly light with smiles she drives away.
But fairest she when so she doth display
The gate with pearls and rubies richly dight.'

Hugh paused ere he added the next lines; however it was but for a moment, and then he repeated them:

'Through which her words so wise do make their way
To bear the message of her gentle sprite.
The rest be works of Nature's wonderment,
But this the work of heart's astonishment.'

Alas! poor Hugh! why, even Geraldine would have clapped her pretty hands, and laughed her merriest laugh to hear her words called 'so wise.'

But if Hugh lived in a dream, so delightful that he would not venture to ask himself whether he were awake or sleeping, so also were there hours in which Gwen, young and truthful, and far more deceivable than she believed herself to be, could scarcely refuse to share the delusion, though to her it was exquisitely painful. 'Is it possible,' she would then exclaim, 'that Mrs. Faulkner's interest, Geraldine's unbounded efforts to please, can have any serious meaning? Whatever Geraldine sets her heart on, she will demand and strive to exact from those who have shown her universal indulgence hitherto, I doubt not.'

Gwen shuddered at the possibility that Geraldine might become her sister, fill the first place in Hugh's heart, and claim one in her own, which at this moment positively recoiled from her. How eagerly did she watch for proofs—'trifles light as air,'—that Geraldine's vanity, not her heart, was touched. Miserable, dissatisfied, scrutinizing, Gwen was an agreeable companion to no one, and every day there was less appearance of peace between her and Geraldine; surely Hugh

must perceive that. He did, but he also thought that it was fully as often endangered by some keen, sarcastic remark of Gwen's, as by some act of tyranny, half-playful, half-passionate, on Geraldine's part. Mrs. Faulkner observed Gwen's increasing dejection. She supposed it was because Hugh's departure drew near. She had thought Geraldine perfectly delightful throughout the visit, full of spirits, and so kind and anxious to entertain her cousins. 'Gwen ought to be grateful to her, and I am sure that Hugh is. He is a dear, handsome boy. I really am sorry that he should take to be a tutor like his father before him. I hope he won't carry the imitation further, and fall in love with a portionless girl, such as his mother was. Those poor marriages are miserable things.'

Catherine had never seen Geraldine in her present character before, and could not altogether understand what was going on, much of it passing not immediately under her eye; and then to her Gwen and Geraldine were still children.

But a crisis came, and the whole thing seemed to vanish like a scene in a play.





CHAPTER XVIII.

L'état où je vous vois afflige trop mon âme,
Et je vous donne avis qu'on trahit votre flamme.
Ah ! son cœur n'a pour vous que de feintes douceurs—
Cela se peut, ma sœur ; on ne voit pas les cœurs—
Hé bien ! c'est assez dit, et sur cette matière
Vous allez recevoir une pleine lumière.

MOLIÈRE.

HUGH'S last day had arrived. On the following morning he was to start for Oxford. Geraldine and her mother made known, at breakfast, their intention of driving into London ; there were sights to be seen, and shopping to be done.

'Neither of which admit of delay?' said Hugh to Geraldine, in a tone of interrogation, addressed only to her ear. As surprise and something like disappointed expectation mingled in Hugh's question, Geraldine's sole reply to it was an assumption of offended dignity, and leaving the room at once, she only returned prepared to accompany her mother. But Mrs. Faulkner always made the carriage wait half an hour, and this time Geraldine spent, whether premeditatedly or not we cannot decide, in conciliating Hugh. She called him to the conservatory, in order that he might select and gather a bouquet for her—was all smiles and gratitude for his exertions in her behalf, and the moments flew very pleasantly till Mrs. Faulkner appeared. Geraldine could not refrain from fresh indulgence of her love of teasing, and her last act was, as they went to the carriage, to bestow on her mother exactly the flower which Hugh had particularly chosen for herself. Nor did her blue eyes acknowledge the

slightest perception of his annoyance ; they looked on him with childish simplicity and much kindness, and she threw herself back in the carriage, saying :

‘I sha’n’t come home without the song you want to hear—your last evening—you shall have everything your own way. I suppose you must not go with us—because of Gwen.’

‘No,’ said Hugh, ‘I can’t. Because of Gwen,’ he repeated to himself, as he re-entered the house ; and though he would not, indeed, have forsaken her, he felt rather glad that she was not at his side—that he could pass a few minutes alone.

Meanwhile Gwen had watched from her window the departure of the carriage with delight.

‘They are fairly gone now !’ she said, drawing a deep breath ; ‘no more change of mind about that.’ She did not reproach herself with selfishness, though she knew that her satisfaction was Hugh’s disappointment, for she believed that Geraldine’s voluntary absence during this, his last day, might save him a much sorer pang than he now sustained. She had felt a little surprise to see Geraldine go away ; but she knew that her caprice was so great that she would often break off in what appeared to be a very earnest pursuit, and forfeit the prize, to follow a new course with a new end in view : and now that her own inexpressible relief was united with Hugh’s advantage, why should she not rejoice ? She hurried over the business that detained her, and went in search of her brother, whom she found in the library, in one of the recesses, leaning on a step of the book-ladder, seemingly lost in the interest of his book. Gwen came softly behind him, looked over his shoulder, and read the lines :

‘Rudely thou wrongest my dear heart’s desire
In finding fault with her too portly pride ;
The thing which I do most in her admire
Is of the world unworthy most envied.
For in those lofty looks is close implied

Scorn of base things, and 'sdeign of foul dishonor,
Threatening rash eyes which gaze on her so wide
That loosely they ne dare to look upon her.
Such pride is praise, such portliness is honor,
That boldness Innocence bears in her eyes.
And her fair countenance like a goodly banner
Spreads in defiance of all enemies.
Was never in this world ought worthy tride
Without some spark of such self-pleasing pride.'

A conviction flashed through Gwen's mind, as she read aloud the first lines, which led her to continue to the end, with marked irony in her tone. Hugh felt it; he put his hand over the book as she ended, and removed his shoulder from the arm which leaned on it. Gwen could not submit to this check. The time, the occasion, the provocation—for we may call it so—all urged her on. She felt, when Hugh even thus gently shrank, as it were, from her touch, that it was Geraldine who interposed herself between them.

'Is it possible,' she exclaimed, 'that you can imagine this to be a description of Geraldine?—that you can discover anything to love, or to admire, in pride such as hers? Ah! if you knew that its chief indulgence has been to trample on your defenceless sister—But you shall know; the time is come when it is better that you should see her in her true colours. How very faint you must have deemed my praise—how very lukewarm my love, where Geraldine was concerned! And did it never occur to you that there must be something that I could not applaud—something I could not love beneath her fair exterior and her beguiling tongue? Oh, Hugh! I never thought for my own sake to tell any human being what I have endured here, but for your sake I will tell you. Remember, I would bear as much over again for the same cause—for my mother. I came here lonely, young; shivering, as it were, in leaving my home and the two I had to love me, and every one knew why I came. If she had any native generosity in her heart (I don't value the

prodigality that crushes with gifts)—could she have made it her sweetest jest to turn into ridicule the poor little plain orphan girl, with no other portion than such talents as Heaven had pleased to give her? Could she have found in her a fit object, not merely for her sport, but to expend the violence of her temper on; to treat, not only with caprice, but with cruel injustice? She has been a tyrant to one who, as she knew, did not dare to resist—for what resistance could I have made that would not have cost what was dear to me as my life? I believe it would have killed me to have been sent home. I was forced to submit if I would remain, and I did submit that I might remain. For me it is nearly over; I have given them no just cause of offence; they may not love me—I don't desire their love. And now I would have left their house in silence, and never henceforth have allowed my tongue to reveal Geraldine's faults, did I not see you the plaything of her vanity, and believe that she is working you all the ill in her power, perhaps rejoicing in this new way of torturing me. Fond of rule I have always thought her, but I knew not how deceitful, till now that I see her endeavouring by every means she can employ to persuade you that she feels what I am certain she does not feel.' Gwen spoke with a vehemence that made her language seem rather that of passion than of truth. Hugh, at first amazed, bewildered, nevertheless was the first to recover himself.

'Be calm, Gwen, I implore you.'

'I may be agitated,' replied Gwen; 'how can I help it, when thus impelled to break a silence long rigorously imposed? But it is for your sake that I break it. I am not speaking under the influence of anger. What I have said is not exaggerated; this, and a great deal more than this, is true. Geraldine is not worthy of your love, if she would accept it; but she would reject it with scorn and mockery. She has been brought up utterly to disre-

gard the feelings of others when they interfere with her own (for feelings I allow she has), and which is worse, when they merely cross her caprice and her humour. Whoever is brought into contact with Geraldine must be the one to suffer and to yield, for she will do neither—not even for her mother, who has weakly idolized her; if for any one, for Catherine, whom she respects—

‘Catherine!’ interrupted Hugh, faltering; ‘Catherine loves her if you do not.’

‘Catherine loves her, I acknowledge; but she could not, she would not gainsay one word that I have spoken. And you, Hugh, how long is it since you have learnt to doubt my truth?’

‘I do not doubt your truth, but I think that you judge harshly; that you look on Geraldine with an eye of prejudice—’

‘Do you?’ exclaimed Gwen, starting up. ‘Now that I have spoken, I *must* be believed.’ And she quitted the room, leaving Hugh expectant, but of what he knew not, and he bent down his head on his folded arms.

After the lapse of a few minutes Gwen, accompanied by Catherine, returned, pale, and looking invincibly determined.

‘Miss Gwen, what can this mean?’ cried Catherine.

‘You shall hear,’ replied Gwen, her voice trembling. ‘Circumstances have impelled me to reveal facts to my brother which he doubts. He thinks that I am mistaken, prejudiced, that I have not seen plainly, nor judged truly the things that have been so long before my eyes. You can decide this question. You are too fair, Catherine, to gainsay me if I speak only truth. Am I right or wrong in telling him that Geraldine’s temper is violent and capricious—that she is careless what she makes others endure or sacrifice for her satisfaction—that she is vain and frivolous—that her sugared words are lavished on strangers just as her affections are set on a new toy or trinket—and that

whosoever believes solid feeling to go with them is bitterly deceived. Flatterers and dependents she seeks to command. Friends!—

Gwen paused—Catherine looked from one to the other; she understood all now—more than Gwen, who had intended to guard her brother's secret, meant her to understand. She pitied Hugh, but felt a pang of a keener nature than that of compassion on hearing the spoilt passionate child whom she loved, and for whom she often feared, spoken of with such forcible reprehension. She was amazed at Gwen's fearless denouncement, and startled at the explosion of long smouldering resentment. She had felt for Gwen, recognised the evils of her position, and done what she could to lessen them; she now perceived that she had never probed the wound deep enough, never ascertained how far the iron had entered into her soul. While Gwen spoke, she stood before Catherine little less proud and vehement than Geraldine herself could be. And when Catherine turned her eyes on the mute anguish of Hugh's countenance, she could understand why this wrath was stirred, if she could not forgive it.

'Mrs. Faulkner,' she replied, 'has idolized Geraldine as her last and only child, and her great beauty and winning ways have made all this worse. She has been over indulged, and often do I fear that the correction of suffering may be in store for her; but I am sure it is not such high and stormy words as these that will do any good. I am surprised, Miss Gwen, that you can have spoken thus of Miss Geraldine, in my hearing, or that of any human being.' And Catherine's voice faltered.

'You do not contradict anything that I have said,' replied Gwen, in a half-suffocated tone. 'Keep to that point now, Catherine, in mercy keep to it. If I have told him one word that you can disprove, disprove it—if you cannot, render me the justice to say that I have not spoken in malice.'

'Of that your own heart will judge better in a

cooler hour,' answered Catherine. 'I will not say you have spoken untruthfully. Mr. Owen, none of us have hitherto regarded Miss Eustace but as a spoilt child, and I hope you have not either; years hence may you meet her again, and find her a woman with many noble qualities brought out, and every evil temper subdued, an honour to her station, and the comfort as well as the delight of those who most cherish her. But I will not conceal from you or from myself that there is room for dread as well as hope, nor deny that Miss Gwen has had a great deal to bear here—more than her temper was equal to; still I think that whatever be the motives or feelings which have impelled her to the proceedings of this day, she will come to regard them with sorrow.'

'Never, never,' sobbed Gwen, 'will I regret what I do for him.'

'Well, of that we will not speak now,' replied Catherine, and she left the room. Gwen approached her brother, and gladly would have thrown her arms round him, and hung upon his neck, but she dared not, for Hugh started as she drew near, and said, hastily, 'Gwen, I can't talk now, nor listen, let me go out. I will see you later.' He snatched up his hat, and Gwen watched him walk quickly along the terrace, and into the wooded paths beyond. When she could see him no longer, she sank down on the lowest step of the ladder against which he had been leaning, buried her face in her hands, and said, 'What have I done?'





CHAPTER XIX.

Beneath thy magic note
My heart is as a slave,
And sinks and rises like the boat
Upon the heaving wave.

Alas ! that hollow art
Such raptures should bestow.
Alas ! that sounds so full of heart
From heartless lips should flow.

Remains of W. S. WALKER.

WHAT have I done ? This question, in a dull tormenting tone, continually recurred, yet gained no conclusive answer. Gwen could not wish to revoke the past, nor could she review it with satisfaction.

‘Miss Gwen, you here still, and the luncheon untouched ? Where is Mr. Owen ?’ asked Catherine.

Gwen rose with an air of bewilderment ; a mixture of pride and of shame prevented her from looking Catherine in the face.

‘I don’t know. I will find him. Why, what hour is it ?’

‘Three o’clock.’

‘And it was eleven,’ murmured Gwen. She ran swiftly upstairs, snatched her cloak and bonnet, and descended again as rapidly. ‘Poor Hugh, can he have been in the cold all this time ? And this day was to have been happy !’ exclaimed she, stopping short, as if appalled by a sense of the extreme misery in which she had, as it were, involved her brother and herself ; dashing away the tears that blinded her, and resuming her speed, she arrived at the end of the terrace, entered the wood, and hurried on to a summer-house on its

edge. 'Here,' she thought, 'Hugh is likely to be,' and here he was, chilled with the cold, the light of his eye quenched, and the glow on his cheek faded. He did not notice her approach until she had seated herself by his side. The change which Gwen observed pierced her to the heart, and without a word, for she felt as if the sound of her voice must be torturing to him, she hid her face in her hands, and wept as quietly as she could. But Hugh did not leave her to weep long, without attempting to minister comfort; he put his arm kindly round her, and wiped, nay, kissed away her tears; still he seemed as if he knew not what to say. At last, in his soft voice, he murmured, 'My dear Gwen, do not cry, you make me much more unhappy. I understand it all now, my poor little sister; but your task will soon be over. You will return to my mother.'

'I can't, till May,' said Gwen; 'but, Hugh, I am thinking of you alone; indeed I am. Why did you ever come here? I bore what touched myself alone, and could bear it, but this I could not endure. Yet I don't know whether I have done right or wrong. Oh! Hugh, would you rather I had not spoken?'—'undeceived you,' she was going to say, but she felt that the words, though true to her ears, must be harsh to his.

'Oh! no,' replied Hugh. 'I would not be ignorant of the painful past,' and again he was silent.

'Do come home,' ventured Gwen; 'you have been so long in the cold.'

But Hugh did not heed the supplication; he laid his hand on her arm, and said:

'Gwen, this is the last time I shall be with you for the present, you know. There are some things that I must say. I was not so foolish, so vain, as you seemed to dread that I might be. I never thought of her as you fancied—she never gave me cause or right to do so. It was no more than—don't you know—can't you remember?'

‘What?’ said Gwen, in a very low voice, after waiting awhile, anxious to lead him on to speak freely, yet afraid that the least interruption might check or retard rather than assist the utterance of his thoughts and feelings. A faint flush passed over his cheek, and his eyes sought not Gwen, but wandered to the furthest point of the landscape.

‘You know those words of Shakespeare,’ he added, with difficulty, ‘about ‘a bright, particular star?’ How often have I thought of them since I have been here. And it seemed that I might have been happy in this remembrance of her had such a remembrance been left me. It is to see that bright star fall, Gwen. Oh! there it is.’

‘Ah!’ cried Gwen, agonised by his words, ‘it was just that delusion which I could not bear—that you should enthrone her—consecrate to a vision of your imagination all the true, warm feelings of your noble heart. Call it back, Hugh, reserve it for a worthier object.’

‘Don’t let us talk of that, Gwen,’ said Hugh, quietly; ‘a few words of Geraldine, and I have done. Think how very young she is—and her mother, whom I was weak enough to fancy everything that a mother ought to be—think how she has injured her? Depend upon it, in years to come, Geraldine’s character will yet triumph over these injurious circumstances, and display its own worthier nature. You heard Catherine express this belief—I share it—I wish you could.’

‘It may be so,’ said Gwen, doubtfully.

‘It will—oh! Gwen, if you could have aided it—could have been her friend!’

‘She does not want the sort of friendship you are thinking of; she would not endure me for a friend.’

‘She endures Dora.’

Gwen hid her face; she was disarmed: ‘I am not Dora,’ she said, with sadness.

‘Try to be like Dora,’ returned Hugh, earnestly. ‘You love her; it is not so difficult to try to be like what one loves.’

‘Nay, then,’ said Gwen, ‘Geraldine, too, might try.’

‘For my sake,’ added Hugh, ‘if not for hers, will you be patient with Geraldine, kind to her, for the remainder of the time that you are here? Oh! Gwen, for your own sake I might ask it; you cannot consider too seriously your present position, nor wrestle too earnestly with its temptations. Think on those solemn injunctions in obeying which alone can you find safety. Think on those sacred words which surely may be applied to it—’

‘Go on,’ said Gwen.

‘Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.’

‘Hugh,’ said Gwen, with self-abasement, ‘Dora has shown me those words before.’

‘May they be graven on your heart and appear in your life!’

‘But,’ said Gwen, timidly, ‘you see it is ‘kind to one another,’ and ‘forgiving to one another;’ all this is mutual, and that would make it so much easier.’

Hugh was silent awhile, then he said :

‘Gwen, you do not often plead to have things made easy—why then here, where you know you may ask and have strength? But surely Geraldine is far more thoughtless than cruel. I have seen her carried away by her own fancies to forget others, but I have never seen her wilfully unkind.’

‘That is just how she often provokes me,’ said Gwen, dejectedly; ‘by doing and saying the most irritating things with the greatest good humour and the brightest smiles. But, Hugh, I will try more than I ever have tried,’ she added, emphatically.

This was enough for Hugh. Of few words and modest professions himself, he did not exact from others reiterated promises, or manifestations of feeling.

He rose now, and drawing Gwen's hand within his arm, began to walk homewards. Gwen detained him ere they reached the terrace :

'You will not tell my mother anything relating to the past ?'

'No,' replied Hugh ; and stopping short, he caught Gwen in his arms, held her to his heart, and gave her one kiss on her forehead. Gwen did not know whether she deserved full, free forgiveness for this day's deed or not, but she felt that Hugh had forgiven her, and this conviction was soothing and strengthening too. As they approached the house they heard the carriage on the drive. Gwen looked frightened, Hugh, pale. He went to the door, and helped Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine to alight. Gwen followed him.

'Well, my dear Hugh—well, Gwen, how have you entertained yourselves ?' asked Mrs. Faulkner.

'They have not touched any food since the morning,' said Catherine, angrily, as she took Mrs. Faulkner's cloak.

'Have you not ? For shame ! You both look quite pale and ill. I am provoked.'

'How dull you seem !' cried Geraldine, springing up the steps. 'You have not been able to get on without me, I see, and I have been sorry all day that I left you.'

'Not very kind to me, that regret, my dear,' observed Mrs. Faulkner.

'Oh ! yes, mamma, poor Hugh's last day, you know, and I shall have you to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,' said Geraldine, kissing her mother.

'Ring for some cake, that we may feed these hungry ones. I am famished too ; and next they shall see the pretty things we have brought for them.'

Like an eager child, she snatched the various packets from Catherine's hand, tumbled on the floor a piece of rich silk, unrolled many yards of ribbon, shook a bundle of matches into a heap of worsted,

and then cried, pettishly, that she could not find what she wanted. Just then the servant brought in two more parcels. One was a travelling desk, which Geraldine instantly seized on, showing all its conveniences, and proved that not one thing was wanting.

‘There, Hugh, that is for you—when you set out on your travels with Lord St. Ruth. I should think you would have the grace to write to us upon it sometimes. And here is a secret drawer—so very secret; there you may treasure any especially precious little notes, Hugh—on pale pink paper—’

Hugh bore all without flinching, was very grateful for the kindness of his cousin, and the desk did exactly suit him in every way.

‘There was no time to have your name put on it,’ said Geraldine, bending down and polishing the brass plate industriously; suddenly looking up, she exclaimed: ‘It is very disagreeable that you must go so soon,’ and again she returned to her occupation.

Catherine stood by, and thought her more than ever a child, and a charming child. Gwen pronounced her more than ever a coquette—yes, already a finished coquette. Hugh felt oppressed at heart, and Mrs. Faulkner’s delicate tact told her that there was some element of pain in all this, though she could not exactly discover what.

‘My dear Gwen,’ she said, ‘you are not forgotten. Here is a shawl that took my fancy and Geraldine’s, and you must wear it for our sakes.’

Gwen drew it round her ungracefully enough, but struggled not to be ungracious, feeling, as she had felt often before, that she could better endure to wear the trifles of dress for their sakes than to receive from them gifts of deeper import.

Great was the relief afforded both to Hugh and to Gwen when Mrs. Faulkner observed:

‘We shall not be alone this evening. Mr. Faulkner brings down some friends with him—some that I shall like you to know, Hugh. Mr. W——, the cele-

brated traveller ; and A—— and L——, both very remarkable men.'

'I want some flowers for my hair,' said Geraldine, walking towards the conservatory.

'Will he follow her?' asked Gwen of herself, with a beating heart. Hugh did not move, and she breathed more freely. In a few moments Geraldine's voice was heard from within.

'Hugh, will you come and gather this fern for me?'

'Oh! do,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, eagerly; 'it looks so lovely in her golden hair.'

Hugh obeyed. Gwen would have darted from the room, but she checked herself, and remained, standing by the fire, listening to Mrs. Faulkner, who attributed her dull abstraction to grief at the prospect of her brother's departure, and sympathised with her as well as she could.

'Poor little thing!' she thought. 'I do believe that, in her odd, dry way, she has a good deal of feeling.'

Certainly Geraldine and Hugh were a long while in gathering the branches of fern which Geraldine bore in her hand trophy-wise, when she returned. She looked very like a beautiful wingless Victory.

'I can't tell how they have treated you, Hugh,' was Mr. Faulkner's greeting when his guests were assembled before dinner, 'but you certainly don't seem the better for your visit to Lascelles.'

This remark did not make any great impression on its hearers generally, but it pierced Gwen to the heart. She placed herself at dinner where she could see Hugh's face. More than one scalding tear started to her eyes in the course of her scrutiny of it, and she bent over her plate to hide the agony of apprehension which seized her. She knew how delicate her brother was, and remembered how he had spent the day.

When passing through the hall after dinner, Geraldine paused beside Gwen, and said, 'I see how unhappy you are. I really am sorry—'

'Oh! don't, pray don't,' Gwen hastily replied, and disappeared.

Geraldine looked after her for a moment. 'I was sorry,' she said, 'and she would not let me be so.' She followed her mother into the drawing-room, and throwing her arms round her, cried, 'Mamma, how unlike Gwen and Hugh are! I can't fancy them brother and sister. Gwen is such a little touch-me-not. I tried just now to show that I was sorry to see her vexed about Hugh. She would not let me say one word. She flew upstairs.'

'Some people can't bear observation, my dear; when they are unhappy they always seem cross, and, if you try to console, it only makes them worse.'

'Well, I must let her alone, then,' said Geraldine, and she went to the piano.

Gwen soon re-appeared, pale, subdued, but certainly not cross. On reaching her own room she had thrown open the window-shutters, and let in a tide of bright moonlight. She stood in it till somehow it seemed to have a purifying, blanching effect on her, to take the angry heat out of her soul; all earthly cares grew shadowy and unreal, like the mists that lay near the ground; heavenly hopes came out one by one, as the stars of the firmament; and Gwen knelt in the broad rays with clasped hands, and prayed. Her tears were dried, but not parched up; dried, as if fanned by an angel's wing.

There was much intelligent, agreeable conversation in Mrs. Faulkner's drawing-room that evening, but Geraldine did not appear greatly to regard it. She had intended and expected that Hugh should ask her to sing immediately that he entered the room; but, on the contrary, he took with modesty a share in the conversation which did him much credit, and gave pleasure to those engaged in it. Gwen listened with delight, beguiled for the time of her sadness; but Geraldine took no pride in the approbation which she saw Hugh win. Can a woman give a more un-

equivocal proof of indifference? At last she fairly yawned.

‘Gwen,’ she said, pettishly, ‘if you would not have me die of weariness, do go and play something.’

‘I can’t play now,’ replied Gwen, with decision.

‘Why not?’

Gwen made no answer, but Geraldine did not therefore desist from her importunity.

‘How very ill-natured you are, and every one is tiresome to-night!’ she exclaimed, with increasing discomposure.

‘What do you want, my dear child?’ asked Mrs. Faulkner, good-naturedly. ‘Something, I am sure,’

‘Yes, mamma, music to keep me awake,’ answered Geraldine, with a little toss of her head.

‘You had better sing to yourself. You won’t be in danger of falling asleep then. Go and look over the music that you brought from town to-day. Hugh will bring you some lights to the piano.’

But no, this did not please Geraldine at all. She had no idea of singing for her own amusement. She continued her interruptions till the whole conversation was broken up by her means. Then, when requested to sing, she still refused. She had asked Gwen to play, and why should she deny her? She ought not to make so many objections about such a trifle.

‘It is a bad habit for young ladies, certainly,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, and Gwen immediately rose, went to the piano, and began to play. She could not understand why Geraldine had made a point of her acquiescence; certainly not that she might listen, for from the moment the music began she heard her talking and laughing gaily, and scarcely was the piece ended than Geraldine was at her side with a song in her hand, begging her to play it. It was not one of Hugh’s favourites—that comforted Gwen—and she complied, doing, as she always did, her very best to aid Geraldine and to render justice to her powers. Geraldine felt the advantage which she derived

from Gwen's accompaniment, and often begged it in her most prevailing manner. She also possessed a harp, and knowing that she never looked more beautiful than when playing on it, had conquered her indolence enough to acquire some proficiency on this favourite instrument. Now drawing it towards her, she began to strike the first notes of '*Al mio castello*,' the pathetic air and words of which she knew touched Hugh deeply. Certainly Geraldine never had looked lovelier than on this evening. She was dressed in white; the fern which she had gathered was fastened in her hair and in her bosom by ornaments of gold. She never executed her song with truer effect, and her face still retained the impress of its sentiment when Hugh came to her side. How could he be elsewhere? She held out a bracelet which she had taken from her arm, and bid him fasten it; she saw that he obeyed with a trembling hand.

'Sing *once* again, Geraldine,' he said.

Geraldine turned to her harp and suddenly began the gayest air she knew. As it ended she said, laughing:

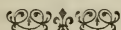
'You see I don't like to be serious too long.'

'Not long enough, perhaps,' replied Hugh.

Geraldine opened her large blue eyes in astonishment—a sort of childish astonishment.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that you spoke just like Gwen?'

'Did I?' replied Hugh, moving away from her; but in a few moments, remembering the danger of awakening suspicion of his sister by change of demeanour in himself, he returned, and for the rest of the evening talked to her only that trifling nonsense which he now thought pleased her best.





CHAPTER XX.

When thou art gone there creeps into my heart
A cold and bitter consciousness of pain.

Poems by F. A. BUTLER.

THE following morning Hugh and Gwen met together in the breakfast room at an early hour. Geraldine hated early hours; therefore she acquiesced readily in her mother's observation, that of course the brother and sister would like best to be alone with each other.

By tacit agreement no allusion was made to the preceding day. They spoke of their mother and of her hoped-for return from Madeira. Hugh gladdened his sister's heart by his cordial admiration of her attainments at Staunton, and spoke tenderly on subjects referring to herself and her future life, avoiding those which bore upon his own. All this Gwen understood, and her heart swelled with grief and love. She observed his looks anxiously when first they met.

'Did you sleep, Hugh?' she asked.

'Not much, dear.'

Gwen sighed, and began making the tea, while Hugh looked through the window, and cried:

'There really are some snowdrops peeping out, there, by that bush. I must have them, indeed I must.' And throwing up the window, he vaulted through it, gathered them, and re-entered. He shared his prize with Gwen, saying fondly as he did so:

'Don't you remember that we used to call you our little snowdrop?'

Catherine came into the room for a moment, to wish

Hugh good-bye. She declared herself little satisfied with his looks; they never had pleased her from the first, and now less than ever. Hugh laughed at the advice she bestowed on him, but promised to follow as much of it as he should remember. Catherine perceived the solicitude with which Gwen listened to her words, and her almost maternal heart was touched; she took a friendly leave of Hugh. Very few words went with the brother's and sister's parting.

'God bless you, my Gwen. Strive for his blessing,' was Hugh's whisper.

'God bless you, Hugh. Let me hear very soon how you are.'

Hugh was gone. 'Would he had never come!' thought Gwen, with bitter vain regret. Hugh, as he passed the gate of Lascelles, and looked back from the last point that commanded a view of it, did not reiterate that wish.

Gwen darted upstairs as she lost sight of Hugh's vehicle, bolted her door, and threw herself on her bed in a passionate flood of tears. Two or three hours later she joined Mrs. Faulkner and Geraldine, pale and silent as a ghost, with the look of one prepared to do or to suffer anything that they might impose. As they were ignorant of her past agitation, all this seemed to them strange and exaggerated. No one could understand it but Catherine, and to her Mrs. Faulkner said now as often before—

'Gwen Owen is a very peculiar girl. Her father was an odd abstracted sort of man, with strong feelings, certainly. She is just like him. I can't bear to think what she would suffer if anything were to happen to her mother, who really, you know, is in a very precarious state.'

'I sincerely hope that her daughter may be permitted to be with her again before death separates them,' said Catherine, earnestly.

'I desire it with all my heart,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, kindly, 'if not—poor Gwen—I would do what I could

for Mary's orphan, Heaven knows. I could easily get over her odd ways and temper, but I never think that she and Geraldine suit each other very well, though they can't now be said to quarrel.'

'Miss Owen won't quarrel,' returned Catherine.

'No. I declare it would be more natural if she would, sometimes.'


'So I have heard Miss Geraldine say,' replied Catherine, laughing.

'I think that the girls have certainly done better since they were at Staunton, have they not?'

Catherine did not answer.

Geraldine felt very dull after Hugh's departure. She would not walk, she would not sing, but sat by the fire, and read the last new novel, and perhaps fancied herself a little in love with Hugh; but then she was not nearly so sure as she desired to be that she had made a conquest of him. The next post brought letters from Madeira, but none from Hugh; Gwen sent on his mother's, and begged to hear from him. Some days later, a feeble scrawl arrived, written from his bed. He was suffering from a feverish attack, produced by cold, he believed, but he was better certainly. After this he had a relapse. Great were Gwen's anxiety and misery, and every one felt for her, but none save Catherine knew the secret springs of alarm and self-reproach in her bosom. There came for two or three days regular bulletins of Hugh's progress from Lord St. Ruth.

'This is kind and nice,' remarked Mrs. Faulkner; and Gwen, in writing to Dora, told her how grateful she felt to Hugh's friend, and how amiable she thought that her father's ward must be, of which remark Dora took but little notice in her reply. There was, in fact, beyond doubt, always some constraint in her way of speaking of Lord St. Ruth, and Geraldine rashly pronounced that he was no favourite with Dora; but Gwen suspended her judgment, for she would pass none hastily that was adverse to one who showed affection for Hugh.



CHAPTER XXI.

Dear land of sunny memories, thine own
Thou makest every heart that once has known
Thy loveliness and grace. Whene'er the breeze
Blows from the south among our native trees,
Whene'er a cloudless sky above us smiles,
A pensive thought of thee the soul beguiles.

‘A FOREIGN epistle for you, mamma,’ cried Geraldine, one morning, bringing the letters with her to the breakfast table. ‘You always like that, you know. What a hold *la bella Italia* keeps on your affections after so many years’ absence! How many?’

‘Twenty-two, my dear, at least,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, with a sigh. ‘It would be strange indeed if the impressions then received could ever fade. All the bright colours of youth and hope, Geraldine, existed as well as those of Italian skies.’

Mrs. Faulkner spoke with really deep feeling, for with her visit to Italy was associated not only the memory of the common enjoyments of a happy girlhood, and the fascinations of that lovely land, but also of her first acquaintance with the husband who had possessed those qualities which Diane could best appreciate; the kindliness, grace, and beauty which realized to her mind everything that fancy could picture in a lover. It was in Italy that Henry Eustace had met her, and wooed, and won.

‘But this is a treat in itself,’ added Mrs. Faulkner, as she broke the seal. ‘It is a letter from my dear, my oldest friend, the companion of my gayest hours.’

‘Who is it that you mean, mamma? Madame Baldovini?’

‘Of course, my dear. Marianna.’

‘Oh! that means Marianne, I know; an English friend of yours, who married and remained at Florence when you and Mrs. Owen came home, chiefly she said because it was such fun to defeat the machinations of the priests and the relations, and to carry off the young Count from the Florentine ladies who were dying for him.’

‘Nonsense! this stuff is your own invention, my dear,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, colouring a little as she spoke.

‘Oh! not at all, mamma; I have heard it from you a hundred times. I think I should rather like this same friend of yours, *detta la Marianna*. Let us go to see her, if you love her so much. I should enjoy just such a winter as you had in Florence, private theatricals and all. First to be presented in London this spring—that is indispensable—then start for Italy in the autumn. Hugh should take us through Switzerland; I really believe it would do you good. You are very delicate. Be a little more so. Just a slight (very slight, dearest mother), cough this spring, and Dr. W. will pronounce on the necessity for the delightful plan I have devised. Poor little Gwen! she must keep school the while. Her mother will be home in May. I am sorry for her. It can’t be helped.’

Gwen, who continued her breakfast with imperturbable gravity, remarked, drily:

‘When it is as you say, I sha’n’t want anybody to be sorry for me. I quite understand, Geraldine, that you are to play and I to work, and I would soonest have it so.’

Mrs. Faulkner was struck by the decided tone of Gwen. These few pointed words seemed so exactly to hit off the vocation of the two girls—Geraldine, so beautiful and bright a creature, with her playful smiles, her golden hair hanging round her face, elegant in

dress and manner,—and Gwen, with her little prim figure, long and formal face, all appearance of youth lost in the deep thought of her brow, and colourless cheek,—‘They are meant to walk in very different paths!’

‘And your father?’ said Mrs. Faulkner, reproachfully.

‘Oh! papa must spare you for one winter; he could have Lady Rivers, and Jemima, and dear Agnes to keep house for him.’

‘Geraldine!’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, in alarm, ‘you never know where to leave off when you are joking. Pray don’t suggest, even in the most trifling way, such a horrid idea as that Lady Rivers should fill my place for a short or a long time!’

‘Mother, dear—as if I meant to annoy you—as if I hated Lady Rivers less cordially than you could desire!’

‘For shame, Geraldine!’

‘Well, mamma, we had better hear what Madame Baldovini says; that will put you into good humour again, now that my idle chatter has ruffled your temper a little more than is agreeable so early in the morning. I know by experience that it is very bad to begin the day by being in a passion.’

‘I allow,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, as her eye ran over the letter, ‘that what Marianna says ought to enable me to bear a great deal of provocation—it makes me so very happy! I am not sure, Geraldine, that it will please you equally as well; it quite overthrows all your pretty schemes—at least for the present; she is coming to England—she must almost have reached Calais—she tells me to write to her there. It is something about a disputed will of one of her English relations that brings her here. She must be in or near London, on account of those dreadful lawyers. She shall feel quite like a foreigner, she says, after so many years’ absence. She fears London will be quite ruinous, poor thing! ‘With my limited income! What ought I to do? Advise me, my friend.’ Of course I will—no difficulty in that—I see at once what she must do—

come here—it is quite near enough to town—she can have the carriage every day if she likes to drive up to her lawyer—and she can see him before she comes down—I will write—oh ! this is delightful !

Could Madame Baldovini have seen her friend at that moment, radiant with joy and with kindness, no doubt she would have asserted that she looked not one whit less lovely than when she had last beheld her twenty years ago. This was just one of those occasions on which Diane heartily rejoiced in being the wife of the wealthy merchant—generous as he was rich—and mistress of the beautiful house which she delighted to throw open to her friends.

‘I must write this very morning,’ she said, rising hastily. ‘I can’t consult Mr. Faulkner about it, and there is no reason that I should—nothing in the world in it that can annoy him, or that he can disapprove of. I shall tell him this evening all I have done. The poor thing must hear from me at Calais—’ As Mrs. Faulkner hastened to the library to write her letter, she could not avoid acknowledging to herself that it would possibly—nay probably reach Mme. Baldovini quite in time, if not despatched till the following day.

‘But why delay ?’ she argued. ‘Mr. Faulkner always allows me to invite whom I will. I am sure he was very patient when that odious Mrs. Mauley seemed as if she never meant to leave us. And then, if I speak to him before I write, Lady Rivers being in town just now, he may not want to answer till he shall have seen her ; and she is sure to raise some objection, solely because it is my wish, for really no reasonable one exists. I shall write at once ; I see that is the only sensible course to take.’

Diane, seated at her *escritoire*, was in a few minutes giving herself the indulgence of composing just such a letter as she was sure that Marianna would like to receive, and would write to her, were she in a similar position ; quite unrestricted in its offers, for Diane was ever averse to allow that ‘it is necessary

that liberality should as well have banks as a stream. Having resolved to write first, and to consult Mr. Faulkner afterwards, she broke down the banks of prudence, and ran on in an overflowing tide of affection, and promises, and professions—the first of which she believed herself to feel, and the two last she sincerely meant to perform. While she said ‘Marianna would do and feel just the same for me,’ it did not occur to her unguarded, generous nature, that if Mme. Baldovini’s epistles were as warm and as profuse in professions as her own, yet circumstances never had allowed their sincerity to be tested ; while, on the contrary, her words had frequently been verified in deeds. Before closing her letter, Mrs. Faulkner read Mme. Baldovini’s a second time, undisturbed by Geraldine’s observations. She now first remarked the announcement that her friend’s son, Ippolito, would accompany her. ‘A boy she could not leave behind her ;’—about Geraldine’s age, I suppose—a mere child ; Italian boys are so, never away from their mother’s side. Of course, he must come too—but why not ? Really he can’t be in Mr. Faulkner’s way, though perhaps he might think he would ; my letter must go—I can’t re-write it—a postscript will do.’ And this Mrs. Faulkner rapidly added, feeling, as she did so, that however admirably adapted for Mme. Baldovini’s perusal her epistle might be, she should be very unwilling to submit it to Mr. Faulkner’s eye ; nay, as she sat there alone, she crimsoned at the thought. The letter was accordingly despatched before her husband’s return, and Diane prepared for dinner with nervous trepidation ; she was, as sometimes occurred, rather late, and had no time for any conversation before they met at table. She intended to approach the subject she had *in petto* with all her usual grace and tact, but Geraldine, of course, defeated these little schemes, and revealed the secret before any preparations were made for its disclosure. Her thoughts had been running on the Baldovini all day, for she had found Las-

celles very dull lately, and looked forward to their arrival as to a novel occurrence. Before she had been seated five minutes, she turned to her mother, and began: 'When your Italian friends will be here, mamma—' Mr. Faulkner looked at his wife in surprise; she coloured a little, and was vexed with herself for doing so.

'My dear Augustus, I was shockingly late to-day; I had no time to read any of my letters to you. I meant to reserve them for the evening, but Geraldine never can keep any secret, therefore I must tell you at once that a very dear—a very old friend of mine—one you have often heard me speak of—Marianna Baldovini—is not yet in England, but will be immediately. It makes me unspeakably happy to think that I shall see her again. She begged for a letter at Calais. I thought that I could not well miss even one post, so you see I did not wait for your return; I have written and invited her here. I knew what your wishes would be in such a case—I could not doubt them.'

'Of course not,' replied Mr. Faulkner, decidedly; 'of course you must have her here. How could I object to your showing her that proof of a regard, of which, as you say, I have heard a great deal?' Mr. Faulkner gave one of his odd smiles, which fretted Diane a little, because she said she knew that they were always provoked by what he called her absurdities.

'But Geraldine said 'your friends,' continued Mr. Faulkner, with sudden alarm. 'I trust I am not to have a foreign count to entertain. I hope her husband is not to accompany her!'

Diane laughed heartily at his consternation.

'No, indeed! I never could have inflicted that punishment without your full knowledge and consent, I assure you.' And she felt much elated to think how harmless what she had done must appear, compared to what she might have been tempted to do. Then resuming her former tone of sensibility, she added:

‘In fact, my poor friend has been a widow for five years, I think, and has known all those griefs and changes which time brings. She is full of energy ; she has an independence—a courage I cannot emulate. Only think of her setting off for England at this season, with only her son, a boy—a mere boy—the *Contino*. He will be with her ; but never fear, we can take very good care of him, without troubling you. The girls can amuse him, and learn Italian.’

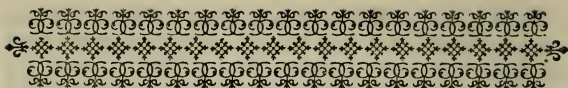
Mr. Faulkner was satisfied, and thought no more of the Baldovini till the following day, when he called for his sister, to bring her down with him to Lascelles. They were nearly there, when he chanced to mention ‘Diane and those Italian friends whom she is expecting.’

Lady Rivers inquired his meaning.

‘Oh! you don’t know—I forgot ;—a Madame Baldovini, an Englishwoman who married a Florentine nobleman—she is a widow, poor thing. Diane used to know her ; they are devoted friends indeed, and she has asked her to Lascelles. It was only yesterday that we heard that she would be in England almost immediately.’

‘Indeed! Madame Baldovini—I do remember to have heard something about her—a woman who turned papist to get on in foreign society ; that is, to obtain a husband and a coronet. I wonder that you have allowed her to be asked into your house.’

As the carriage stopped at this moment, Mr. Faulkner was spared the trouble of exonerating himself from blame, by explaining how little he had to do with the hospitable invitation accorded to Diane’s friend. Lady Rivers entered Lascelles resolved to sift the matter thoroughly, and poor Mrs. Faulkner was little aware what was in store for her, while welcoming her almost as graciously as if she were one of those she was best pleased to see there.



CHAPTER XXII.

Je sais que vous parlez, madame, le mieux du monde.
En beaux raisonnemens vous abondez toujours,
Mais vous perdez le temps et tous vos beaux discours.

MOLIÈRE.

LADY RIVERS began her attack on her sister-in-law as they were sitting round the fire in the evening, before Mr. Faulkner had joined them. Mrs. Faulkner had rejoiced, during dinner, in being able to speak to her husband with perfect freedom on the subject of her friend's arrival, and therefore felt rather more equal to the inevitable encounter than usual.

'Pray, Diane,' was Lady Rivers' first interrogation, 'is Madame Baldovini coming to live in England?'

'Oh, no! she has a son, to whom she is perfectly devoted.'

'A son! what may be his age?'

'I don't know; beginning to grow up, I suppose.'

'Has she left him in Italy?'

'Certainly not; she would not leave him for the world. He is to her what Geraldine is to me.'

'Indeed! I hope he is not quite so unruly,' replied Lady Rivers, with a smile scarcely less severe than her frown; she added: 'You mean, then, that this young gentleman accompanies his mother?'

'I do,' said Mrs. Faulkner, hastily, 'and I shall be charmed to see him. We shall all like to have him. A boy of his age will not be the least annoyance to Augustus.'

‘What age?’ asked Lady Rivers, but Mrs. Faulkner did not seem to hear her, and she continued: ‘Annoyance to Augustus, no; I should think there was more danger of that from his mother.’

‘Madame Baldovini is a remarkably clever, agreeable woman, and my particular friend,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, with emphasis.

‘So you have told me; but I can scarcely fancy my brother getting on well with any one so completely foreign—’

‘Marianna always did know how to get on well with every one,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, carelessly; well knowing how extremely Lady Rivers disliked the appellations of ‘Marianna,’ and ‘Diane.’ It was hard to be angry with ‘Diane,’ because it really was Mrs. Faulkner’s name, and she could not bear the blame of it.

Lady Rivers looked determined that Madame Baldovini should know the mortification of failure once. Mrs. Faulkner was harassed and uncomfortable. Her sister-in-law’s presence always robbed her of her native ease and grace. Lady Rivers had not yet exhausted the subject.

‘Is the stay of your friends in England to be long?’

‘I really don’t know; it is not easy for them to calculate, when it depends on lawyers.’

‘I suppose it will not all be passed at Lascelles? Madame Baldovini being an Englishwoman must have relations on whose attentions she will have a greater claim than on those of a mere friend.’

‘I don’t imagine that she has any relations left; but I hope to give her a welcome which will make it impossible for her to feel lonely on visiting her native land, even after so long an interval of absence from it,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, with spirit, and she rose and crossed the room, as if in quest of her work-box, saying to herself the while: ‘A *mere* friend; I wonder what a mere friend is?’

Mrs. Faulkner was thankful to see Geraldine enter the room at this moment. Sometimes she was unwilling to call her to her aid, and rather would endure what Lady Rivers could inflict than rouse the storm which was sure to break when she and Geraldine were thrown together. They were, and always had been foes. Lady Rivers did not get on much better with Gwen who declined her patronage, while Geraldine resented her correction. Geraldine disliked her, as a 'disagreeable tyrannical woman, who fretted and vexed mamma whenever she came to Lascelles, and even made her cry sometimes, and could turn and twist papa any way she pleased almost; for when he seemed to have given, or at least to be about to give, his consent to some plan, the most delightful in the world, she would prevail on him to reject it.' It is true that Lady Rivers could make her brother harden when half inclined to melt; but to retract a promise of acquiescence, no one could effect that; for which very cause Mr. Faulkner was not ready in according promises. His wife had once or twice tried the plan of exclaiming:

'Oh! but you have promised—' and met with so sharp a rebuke that she now seldom got further than an observation, sometimes a tearful one: 'Well, I did think that you meant to gratify me in this—and so, perhaps, you did, if—'

But by the time that she arrived at the *if*, she was made sensible that the experiment was dangerous. Her words were more than once cut off by a dry, 'You know my intention now, Diane.'

On the present occasion, however, having won the concurrence of her husband very easily, it was not to be supposed that Mrs. Faulkner would submit to Lady Rivers' cross-examinations and insinuations. Still she was better pleased to owe her silence to Geraldine's presence than to her own administration of any check sufficient to restrain one over whom a delicate reproof

had no power. During the rest of that evening Mrs. Faulkner, protected by her husband, by Geraldine, by Gwen, could venture to set her foe at defiance more than she had ever yet done, though when she retired at night, terribly weary of Lady Rivers' catechetical mode of examination, she said to Catherine, 'She makes me so nervous that I scarcely know what I say before her.'

This interview with her sister-in-law confirmed Lady Rivers in a long-cherished opinion that Diane was one of the silliest women in the world, and she laboured, as in the discharge of a sacred duty, to impress Mr. Faulkner with a like conviction; it was no less her purpose to persuade him that she herself was the wisest, if it were only for the discovery of Diane's all-pervading folly. Unfortunately, Lady Rivers had more success than she merited, for she did not duly estimate either her sister-in-law or herself. The one shut her eyes wilfully on her own folly; she had but to open them to be wiser—I do not say wise; the other, throughout life, mistook the cunning of a narrow intellect, and the self-seeking of a mean spirit for wisdom and for prudence.

Lady Rivers thought it her duty to make one more effort, in her drive to London with her brother the next morning, to convince him that Diane ought not to have taken so decided a step as that of inviting these Italians into his house without previously consulting him. But Mr. Faulkner could not be brought to look on the subject in this point of view.

'Diane knows that I never interfere with her former friendships unless there be some serious objection in the way. I don't see that here. What does it signify whether she throws away a few hundreds on this whim or on another? All ladies have their fancies—on this point Diane really feels warmly, and after all you do not know that Madame Baldovini is unworthy of her friendship.'

‘I don’t like Englishwomen who marry foreigners,’ replied Lady Rivers.

Mr. Faulkner assented emphatically, but did not show the least wish to retract the *carte blanche* he had given his wife as to her reception of the lady who had been guilty of this great offence.





CHAPTER XXIII.

I was born to speak all mirth, and no matter.

SHAKESPEARE.

IT was in the month of March that the Baldovini arrived in England, and they were expected at Lascelles with much excitement, not only by Mrs. Faulkner, but by both the girls. They felt not a little shy of the introduction of the young Count Ippolito, whom his mother spoke of as her '*idolo*,' and her '*tesoro*,' but did not particularly describe otherwise. They wondered whether he could speak any English? of course he could, having an English mother—and were rather nervous as to whether he would understand their Italian. But Mrs. Faulkner diminished their fear by telling them that it would be unnecessary to address him in anything but French, unless they wished it, as every well-bred Italian could converse fluently in that language. Gwen, however, fervently trusted that the young Count would speak Italian, and not that '*anti-toscanissimo gergo nasale*,' which Alfieri pronounces French to be. She hoped, too, that he would read to them the poetry of his native land, but Geraldine did not desire this at all, but only that he might sing duets with her; both Geraldine and Gwen had their wishes gratified.

'Why, Miss Geraldine, don't you know that Madame Baldovini and her son are arrived, and in the drawing-room?' asked Catherine.

'Oh! yes, I know it perfectly. I peeped from the balcony, and saw a fine lady covered with fur and lace,

get out of the carriage, and a gentleman, quite tall—could that be the *Contino*? with a cloak, also trimmed with fur—muffled up—how very ridiculous! how effeminate! Hugh would laugh at such precautions on the coldest day, delicate as he is. I don't intend to go down stairs yet. I shall leave all the bustle and trouble of receiving them to mamma and Gwen. I hate that sort of thing. I shall stay here till dinner time, I think, Catherine, unless I am called, and certainly I sha'n't go then.'

'How very absurd you are, Miss Geraldine,' replied Catherine. 'This is all to give yourself a little importance.'

'Is it? Shame on you to say so. It is fondness for you that makes me stay here by your side,' said Geraldine, who was sitting on a low stool by Catherine, employed in pulling out one by one the pins with which Catherine had marked her work. 'Now why should I go to these outlandish people?'

'Because, till now, you were dying of curiosity to see them. I am glad, however, that you can control that feeling, Miss Geraldine. Perhaps you are struggling with it on purpose.'

'No, no; I never make those struggles; they are very ungraceful. I leave them to Gwen. It is just that which makes her so stiff and rigid. I like to be *sans gêne*, you know. But I will tell you the real reason of my staying here, Catherine, if you wish to hear it.'

'Just as you please.'

'It is a little secret.'

'Well, it will be safe with me.'

'Ah, you are curious, I see. Now for the treason. I am inclined to suspect that mamma will make a little too much of these people, and that I shall find it rather tiresome. You know I don't like very sentimental friendships. Dora and Gwen almost provoked me sometimes. I think that I shall leave mamma and Marianna entirely alone.'

‘You mean that they won’t want you.’

‘No, I don’t,’ replied Geraldine, angrily; ‘mamma will always want me; I am very sure of that.’

‘Yet you won’t scruple to let her alone? And what do you intend to do with the young Count?’

Geraldine perceived, or fancied that she perceived, a slight increase of interest involuntarily betrayed in Catherine’s tone, and this, of course, it became her delight to baffle. ‘I don’t know yet. We shall see.’

She looked up with a smile, and added, ‘Gwen intends that he shall teach her Italian.’

‘He will have an apt scholar,’ replied Catherine.

‘Do you think Gwen sure to succeed in everything she intends?’ asked Geraldine.

‘Certainly not. No one ever did. But I expect she will have an uncommon share of success.’

‘Because she is so clever? and so hard working?’

‘Yes.’

‘Catherine, do you think I am clever?’

‘I really cannot tell. You are so idle that it makes it difficult to judge. Sometimes I am inclined to think you so, and sometimes the reverse.’

‘Thank you, my very discriminating, plain-spoken Catherine,’ said Geraldine, making her a low courtesy. ‘Now have you the slightest notion of a certain sort of pleasure—malicious, perhaps, you will call it—particularly beguiling to a person, not very clever, as you say, not at all profound and painstaking, or systematic, suddenly by a *coup-de-main* to sweep off the victory from one like Gwen? Sometimes this is a temptation to me.’

‘A temptation,’ replied Catherine, gravely, ‘remember, Miss Geraldine, the word you are using.’

‘Yes,’ cried Geraldine, hastily, ‘but not in that tone, Catherine; I did not speak in that tone, nor must you;’ and she put her hand before Catherine’s mouth.

‘Really, Miss Geraldine, one would think you were a child of seven years old—see what you have done to

my work !' said Catherine, suddenly discovering the mischief perpetrated by idle fingers.

'And yet I am in truth seventeen ! and hope to be presented in May. But I am very silly—that is just what I was going to confess, and now you see it speaks for itself.'

'Geraldine, my child,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, at the door of the room in which Geraldine and Catherine were sitting, 'come here. Why were you not down stairs ? Come with me to Mme. Baldovini. I am dying for her to see you.'

'She will see me quite soon enough, mamma.'

'No, my dear ; she is naturally impatient to do so. And what do you think, Catherine ? She asked me if Gwen were my daughter ! I tried to make her remember Mary Owen, but could not in the least succeed ; they never got on at all, to be sure. Her memory is fresh as yesterday for me and all she really loved. Come, Geraldine, I am longing to take you to her !'

'Well, I don't so much care now that she is in her own room. But mind, mamma, only for a minute.'

'Very well, my child, just one look at you !'

Geraldine rose, and allowed her mother to lead her to the apartment assigned to Madame Baldovini. When there, she found herself in the presence of a handsome, elegantly dressed woman, whose first look and tone deprived her of the power, had she retained the wish, to display any pettishness or egotism, so completely were they those of one conversant with the world, equally accustomed to the dignified formalities of courts, or the graceful ease of the most intimate circle. She received Geraldine with a smile which displayed very beautiful teeth, extended the whitest and most graceful hands possible, and kissed her affectionately on each cheek. Geraldine felt certainly much astonished, and uncertain whether or not she was pleased. But there was something beyond all doubt satisfactory in Madame Baldovini's little step back, and look of profound and almost breathless admiration,

followed by a delicate congratulation uttered in a subdued tone to Mrs. Faulkner, calling her 'dearest Diane,' with the prettiest foreign accent, which charmed Geraldine in spite of herself, and made her forget all the queen-like airs of condescension which she had meant to display at this interview. Madame Baldovini was in fact a most accomplished actress, and Geraldine and her mother knew little about the matter. Mrs. Faulkner's seeming affectations were parts of her very nature, while Geraldine's artifices were transparent as those of a child.





CHAPTER XXIV.

I noted her not, but I looked on her.

SHAKESPEARE.

GERALDINE flew to Gwen's room: 'Well, Gwen, what do you think of Madame Baldovini? Is she not excessively handsome, and beautifully dressed, and has she not very good manners? Don't you think that she is quite different from any one else you ever saw?'

Gwen answered with consideration: 'I never did see any foreigners before, except Mademoiselle Vernet, and one or two governesses.'

'She is not a foreigner—only rather foreign, certainly. There is something in her very kind—so much heart, Gwen.'

'She is kind in manner,' replied Gwen, who had been gratified by receiving from Madame Baldovini precisely the same courtesy which she exhibited to others. She was invariably courteous.

'Now I want to know what the son is like.'

'He is just what I—what any one would expect an Italian to be—like a picture.'

'What, moustaches, and dark hair? He is quite grown up. I saw that—as tall as Hugh.'

'And taller,' said Gwen, solemnly, which made Geraldine laugh heartily.

'And handsomer, Gwen?'

'I dare say some people would say much handsomer,' replied Gwen, embarrassed by Geraldine's mirth.

'Did he speak any English?'

'Not one word. Nothing would induce him to do

so. His mother tried in vain. I am sure that he understands it perfectly. He looks as if he did; but he would only answer in French.'

'And you spoke French with him?'

'Of course.'

'Did you make any blunders?'

'I think I did, for I was frightened.'

'Frightened!' repeated Geraldine, scornfully. 'I am sure I will not be frightened by him.'

'I could not help it,' said Gwen, 'at first, but I don't intend to be so again, either. You speak as if you had seen him as well as his mother?'

'Oh! I watched them as they got out of the carriage, and very nearly met him on the stairs as I came here, but I was resolved that he should not see me.'

'How do you like Lascelles, *caro mio*?' asked Madame Baldovini of her son, as he entered, almost at the moment that Geraldine quitted the room.'

Ippolito shuddered, rolled an arm-chair towards the fire, with its back to the window, ensconced himself in it, and throwing back his head, replied with an expressive shrug:

'*Non troppo.*' They had travelled in a keen March wind. 'There,' he said, looking at the fire, 'is our only sun now.'

'The warmth of reception makes some amends for the chill of the climate, I think,' replied his mother. 'But I assure you my friend's manner is by no means a specimen of that of her countrymen in general. I can't let you hope that. We shall be frozen to death perhaps when the *Padrone di casa* returns this evening. Diane is much more like a pretty Frenchwoman than an ordinary Englishwoman.'

'Very affected,' returned Ippolito, '*seccante.*'

'She is wearisome, certainly,' allowed his mother, 'but munificent as a princess, and unsuspecting and kindhearted in the highest degree. Depend upon it that she will fulfil to the utmost that charming letter

which we received from her at Calais; and really, Ippolito,' she said, glancing round the luxuriously furnished apartment, which Mrs. Faulkner had taken pains to beautify, because she knew that everything in England would look cold and cheerless to Italian eyes, 'we are very well here.'

'Oh, very;' replied Ippolito, indolently; 'but, mother, you told me that Mrs. Faulkner had a daughter, a miracle of beauty, and yet no sooner did you enter the room, and see that ugly little girl, than you hazarded the supposition that it was she. What could you mean?'

'Why, I had only heard of her beauty from her mother, you know,' said Madame Baldovini, laughing heartily, 'and I could not be sure how far maternal eyes might deceive themselves. I admire you far more than any one else does, no doubt.'

'No doubt,' returned Ippolito, looking at himself with consummate satisfaction, in a mirror which reflected him from head to foot, and coming to the conclusion that not one characteristic of Italian beauty was wanting in the image he saw there. Crisp curls of hair, black and glossy as a raven's wing, clustering round a head of classic form, eyes of wonderful brilliancy and depth of colour, features finely cut as chisel ever sculptured, teeth of surpassing whiteness, '*il lampeggiar del riso*,' and a frown like that of young Achilles on the walls of Pompeii. Such was Ippolito at the age of twenty, and not less the spoiled idol of his mother (whose side up to this age he had seldom quitted), than Geraldine had been that of her parent; adding moreover to her natural haughtiness of character, all the prejudices of high birth and rank, and of the narrowest possible education.

'I have seen the real Geraldine, now,' said his mother, after she had amused herself sufficiently in watching his survey of himself.

'Well, what is *la bella Giralda* like?' asked Ippolito, yawning.

'You will be a little more excited when you have

seen her than you are now. I shall only say that she is very stately and proud, and she has a right to be so.'

'Oh! a piece of ice—a beautiful statue that is to be set up for us to worship.'

'No, I think not that,' replied his mother; 'but I won't speak of her again. By-the-bye, what penetrating eyes that little dark girl down stairs has. I don't much like her look.'

'I do,' said Ippolito. '*E brava se non è bella.* I dare say I shall much prefer her to your beauty.'

'You can pass to your room through that door; there is a communication between us. It is time to prepare for dinner. Mr. Faulkner comes down every day from the counting-house, where he is making millions, I dare say. Punctuality, you must learn, is the *vizio* of these English. Come, don't alarm him the first day, for really, Ippolito, you know, we cannot do better than stay here.'

When Ippolito entered the drawing-room with his mother, he thought that the other ladies must be dressed for a ball, so different was their toilette from what he would have seen in his own country, on an occasion so private. There now followed an introduction to Mr. Faulkner, and very formal it was on his part, certainly. Of Ippolito he felt especially afraid, because he did not exactly know in what language to address him. He had in some measure protected himself against the young foreigner by bringing with him a clerk of his house, whom he did not often treat with so much condescension,—'a whipper-snapper fellow,' he thought him, 'but he knew that he was a capital hand at French.' To Geraldine, Ippolito was next presented, and then rather overpowered by all he had gone through, he seized with eagerness a vacant chair by Gwen, who he knew could and would talk to him, and devoted himself to her till he was called on to conduct Mrs. Faulkner to the dining-room. Mr. Faulkner was speedily relieved of all fear as to his power of entertaining Madame Baldovini; her ease of manner and

unwearying discourse soon restored him to equanimity. He found that she amused him very much, and she had the art to make him feel that he in turn was agreeable to her. Her voice, pitched unusually high to English ears, drowned the French which prevailed at the upper end of the table. Ippolito, who was really more lively and amusing than his mother, in the society of strangers became mute, though his pride would not have allowed him to acknowledge that he was shy; neither Mrs. Faulkner's good-nature nor Gwen's various remarks could elicit much conversation from him. He was no less struck by Geraldine's beauty than his mother had anticipated, and to watch her in silence was his chief occupation, framing an idea of her character, and of the manner in which he should meet her later. He saw that she might justly be pronounced proud, and he resolved to refuse the homage which she would be disposed to command. Easy conquests she must already despise, he said to himself, for he was quite surprised to see these two young girls in a position so different from that which they would have taken in his own country. 'Their manners and conversation,' he afterwards told his mother, 'were such as might have been rather expected from the brides of last year than from girls who ought only just to have emerged from their convents.'

'But convents they have none,' replied Madame Baldovini. 'In a month or two Geraldine will be introduced to all the gaieties of a London season. The opera, the ball-room, will reckon her among their brightest ornaments—that little plain girl is only a poor relation, I fancy. I don't know what will become of her.'

When the ladies withdrew, Ippolito looked imploringly at his mother, and would gladly have made his escape with her; but now was the time of triumph for which Mr. Lomax had been eagerly waiting; the time of accomplishing his assertion made to Miss Eustace, that he would draw out the young foreigner

and discover what he was fit for. Ippolito was constrained to be his victim, and chose to fancy that fresh torture was in store, when, on entering the drawing-room, in consequence of his mother's declaration of his passion for music, Mrs. Faulkner sent him with Geraldine and Gwen to the piano. But the first chords struck by Gwen, the first tones breathed by Geraldine, could not fail to convict him of error. He condescended to be pleased, to become animated—nay, even to seat himself at last at the piano and sing one short song. It was vain to ask for a second.

‘His voice was utterly ruined by the climate for the present,’ he said, ‘and he doubted whether it would recover during his stay in England, if ever.’

It was a fine tenor, and Mrs. Faulkner remarked that he and Geraldine might sing duets well together—a remark which received no countenance from Geraldine, who had decided that the young Count might seem shy, but was in fact very conceited.

‘I can see that I shall find him extremely disagreeable,’ she thought, as she turned over the pages of her music, without condescending to speak.

‘How strikingly like the portraits of Marie Antoinette Geraldine is!’ exclaimed Madame Baldovini, looking at her in her proud beauty at that moment.

‘Ah! every one has observed that resemblance from her very childhood,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner.

‘What a brilliantly fair skin!’ observed Madame Baldovini, half apart to Mrs. Faulkner; but all heard the ejaculation, and it seemed strangely enough the occasion of Ippolito's speaking in the most enthusiastic terms to Gwen of the dark beauties of his own land, till Geraldine attained to the mortifying conclusion that he thought every one else insipid.





CHAPTER XXV.

For the which she wept heartily, and said she cared not.

SHAKESPEARE.

‘MY dear Catherine,’ exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner, ‘I had no idea that Madame Baldovini’s son was so completely grown up.’

‘I thought that you knew his age, ma’am,’ replied Catherine, quietly. She had frequently heard her mistress mention that Mary and Ippolito had been born nearly on the same day—a circumstance which formed an additional link between herself and her friend.

Mrs. Faulkner longed to say or to make Catherine say, ‘I hope he will not think of falling in love with Geraldine;’ but the latter she could not effect, and, greatly as it would have relieved her to proffer the remark herself, she refrained from thus bearing evidence to her own precipitation and imprudence.

‘I am sure,’ she said, fretfully, ‘I do not know how I shall get rid of him. It will be terrible to have him idling at Lascelles all day. I looked forward to the quiet enjoyment of my friend’s society, and thought that I could let the children take care of themselves.’

‘But indeed, ma’am, there are no children here now,’ replied Catherine, earnestly. As to the quiet enjoyment which Mrs. Faulkner had anticipated, Catherine could not at all picture to herself what that would have been; but she supposed nothing incompatible with a daily morning or evening visit to London, and attendance on as many entertainments as the season

afforded. The society of an old friend was certainly not sufficient for Madame Baldovini, who desired to see everything that was to be seen. She was, indeed, also willing to talk to her friend by the hour, as she said, 'most confidentially, knowing how Diane could sympathise with her. There is a great difference, and you understand it, Diane, between feeling for and with a person. You are one of the few who can do both. I place full reliance on your regard, and then I entertain such a high value for your opinion.'

This was soothing after Lady Rivers' undisguised contempt ; and Mrs. Faulkner trusted that, if so clever a woman as Madame Baldovini could thus esteem her judgment, she need not suspect herself of just having done a remarkably silly thing.

Mrs. Faulkner was for a time an excellent listener, and really amused and interested by all she heard, but she began ere long to perceive that Madame Baldovini absorbed all the interest herself, and cared very little to know in return the details of her friend's life, and still less of her feelings. Mrs. Faulkner was a little disappointed, and moreover disconcerted, on finding herself in a secondary position. However, Madame Baldovini's caressing manner and lively gratitude kept any half-defined sensations of this nature in abeyance. On more accounts than one, Mrs. Faulkner recognised that she could not do better than acquiesce in her friend's evident wish to be introduced to the gay world.

'It is certainly safer,' she thought, 'than staying at home, and providing Ippolito with no occupation but that of flirting with Geraldine. Really at present he takes quite as much or more notice of Gwen—how very odd!—when Geraldine is near.' And the silly mother could not quite reconcile herself to this want of homage to her daughter's charms. In accordance with her decision, the carriage was ordered nearly every morning for London ; the day was spent in sight-seeing, and the evenings occasionally in enter-

tainments. But Mrs. Faulkner was inflexible in prohibiting Geraldine from partaking in the latter.

‘No, no, my dear, you are no longer a child, and I cannot allow you to appear anywhere in the evening. It really will not do now till you are regularly introduced. It cannot be.’

Geraldine pouted ; but, when she found that she showed dissatisfaction in vain, she desisted. Still her dignity was nearly overcome, when Ippolito, on the first evening after the decision of this weighty point, exclaimed, with astonishment, on finding her alone and *dishabillée* in the drawing-room before the appearance of the two elder ladies :

‘Is it possible that you are not going with us to-night? You talked of the ball ; you said how you expected to enjoy it. You never gave me the slightest idea of this all day. You have acted with caprice on purpose to torment me.’

Geraldine was startled at his vehemence, but she answered, pettishly, ‘I assure you that I was not thinking of you in the least, and it is I myself who am tormented.’

Tears stood in her eyes.

‘What can this mean?’ asked Ippolito, more gently.

‘Only that mamma has decided that I am never to go out in an evening,’ said poor Geraldine, too proud to weep, angry to be under control, and impatient of the loss of pleasure.

‘Then why should we?’ cried Ippolito, hastily.

‘What difference can it make as to that?’ asked Geraldine.

‘Every difference,’ replied Ippolito, taking a hurried turn up and down the room. ‘It is just that you should be punished sometimes. You love to inflict punishment yourself. You are vexed now ; nevertheless, it consoles you for your own loss to see that it deprives me also of enjoyment. I know all this well. *Cattiva!*’ He was lashing himself into a passion.

‘What nonsense you talk!’ said Geraldine, colouring.

The door opened, and Mrs. Faulkner and Madame Baldovini entered in full dress, charmed with each other and themselves. Both looked extremely handsome. Madame Baldovini's toilette studiously rectified every defect of nature, and concealed the inroads of time; while Mrs. Faulkner's, though selected with taste and much consideration, had nothing false in it. Indeed, beside her more artificial friend, Diane appeared simple, but it was a simplicity which, even at forty, became her well. Ippolito thought only of '*La Cenerentola*,' as he called Geraldine, whom they left inwardly very disconsolate, and no kind fairy waved a wand to transport her after them.

'I have only Gwen,' she said, with an angry movement of her shoulder; but she was soon forced to conciliate her sole remaining companion, coaxing her to the piano to practise a song which she thought she should like to sing the next morning to Ippolito. 'Not that I believe a word of his caring whether I went or not to-night; he is not half so good-natured as Hugh, and is always teasing me.'

Still Geraldine could not doubt the fact that thenceforward Ippolito found many ingenious ways of throwing obstacles in the way of evening engagements from Lascelles.

From the commencement of this acquaintance there had been no great promise of harmony between Geraldine and Ippolito, it must be allowed. Geraldine had been accustomed to considerable submission on the part of Hugh, who, if he sometimes offered a firm resistance (as when he refused to place her on the ice without Mrs. Faulkner's permission), in all that concerned himself, and the relinquishment of his own will or pleasure to her merest caprice, yielded with his characteristic mildness, and afforded her so easy a conquest that she ceased to covet and was even at times ashamed to accept it. 'There was no triumph in it,' she said, 'and Hugh was a kind creature, who did not deserve to be ill-treated.'

It was far otherwise with Ippolito. Both alike proud and impetuous, they were perpetually quarrelling, yet always together. Cross each other as they might, there was still some strong principle of attraction. Sometimes Ippolito would be very sullen for at least half a day, and sometimes Geraldine would come to Catherine, her cheeks the brightest geranium colour, her eyes sparkling, and would declare that 'the Italian boy was perfectly intolerable—his impertinence—his rudeness—his conceit—why was he to be borne with?'

'Well, then, Miss Geraldine, you had much better let him alone. He is in the schoolroom with Miss Gwen. Nothing could be quieter than they were when I went through just now—both drawing. Can't you go to your mamma, or amuse yourself?'

'That is like them!' cried Geraldine, angrily. 'Very quiet when I am not there. Yes; both want me to think that they are much happier without me.'

'Of course they are, if you will be so fretful and impatient,' replied Catherine, quietly.

'It is very well for Catherine to speak thus,' thought Geraldine, much discomposed by her tone of acquiescence. 'I am convinced that Ippolito will be excessively mortified if he hear me singing just as if nothing at all had happened.'

Accordingly, she tried what effect one of her gayest songs would produce, and it was not long before she and Ippolito were quarrelling together over a duet. How did Gwen like this? She only bent her head lower over her drawing. Ippolito had some talent for painting, and some knowledge of it. He was teaching Gwen what she did not know before, but now he was gone from her, and she must find out and rectify her errors for herself.





CHAPTER XXVI.

She hath no portion in life's work or play,
Its changes or its cares. Her doom is said.

Remains of W. S. WALKER.

IT was not long before Lady Rivers made a point of calling at Lascelles.

‘How tiresome, for we were just going out!’ cried Mrs. Faulkner; ‘and I see Jemima’s carriage coming up the drive.’

‘And must we stay at home for that?’ asked Geraldine.

‘Certainly, my dear, and no doubt she will have brought Jemima and Agnes to see you.’

‘Oh! I sha’n’t encounter them yet. They will stay some hours now they are once here. I shall make my escape to the billiard-room—for the present, at least,’ said Geraldine, darting through the door, and Ippolito of course following her.

‘Pray don’t all run away,’ exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner, in distress.

Gwen quietly seated herself, and said, ‘I can take care of the two girls.’

Madame Baldovini had not the least intention of withdrawing; she liked strangers, and she particularly wished to meet Lady Rivers. She had heard quite enough of her, directly and indirectly, to excite curiosity, if not alarm.

Lady Rivers was come to Lascelles to see and to judge for herself. This gave a more than ordinary

severity to her demeanour ; it could not be justly called dignified, because there was a tincture of doubt, and of suspicion, and of curiosity—all of which are singularly undignified emotions. The meeting between her and Mme. Baldovini was in itself an entertaining scene, only there was a lack of spectators to be entertained. Mme. Baldovini being the person least occupied by personal feelings, was most capable of relishing it, and she afterwards told her son that it had been '*impayable*.'

Lady Rivers glanced round the room as she entered, desirous to take in the whole of what might be going on in it at once. This rendered her manner so pre-occupied that she responded with a very ill grace to Mrs. Faulkner's very graceful introduction of her friend. The first subject of conversation which Madame Baldovini introduced was her great happiness at Lascelles.

'Your kind brother—it is impossible for me to express the gratitude which I feel for his noble reception of us. It is indeed gratifying—deeply gratifying—that such a favourable impression should be made on my son's mind by my country-people, the first time that I bring him among them. He already loves England for the sake of the English, just as I would have him. He, no more than myself, can ever forget the generous hospitality which has met us. How happy it would make us to look forward to a time when we might manifest our feelings in deeds, not words. But there seems little chance of that. I shall never, I fear, see Mr. Faulkner in Florence ; do you think I shall, Diane?—Not, indeed, that my home there is what it once was,'—she looked down and sighed.

Lady Rivers immediately concluded that Madame Baldovini never intended to return to it, but probably would attempt to live on Mr. Faulkner's bounty for the rest of his life.

'When you leave Lascelles,' she asked emphatically, 'do you return to Italy?'

‘No, I think not; to Paris rather. I delight in Paris; and Ippolito does not know it as he should.’

‘I particularly dislike France and the French,’ said Lady Rivers; ‘they are a very false people.’

‘I think it is,’ replied Madame Baldovini, with the blandest of smiles, ‘that they have hearts too kind to like to utter any disagreeable truths,’ and she glanced at Diane as she spoke.

‘I am English enough to like truth *sans fard*,’ said Lady Rivers, stiffly.

‘Do you?’ cried Madame Baldovini. ‘Ah! one must be so very superior to be able to encounter that.’ And she assumed an air of awe and deference.

Lady Rivers felt as if there was more than she understood in this conversation, and turned to Mrs. Faulkner to disengage herself from the subtle foreigner, as she deemed her.

‘I have brought my daughters to see your young people, Diane. I hope they will not miss Geraldine.’

‘Oh, no! she is at home. I must send for her,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner; not, however, taking the measure.

‘We heard the billiard-balls when we were in the hall,’ said Agnes, anxious to see her favourite. ‘I think Geraldine was playing.’

‘Alone?’ asked Lady Rivers.

‘I dare say your son is playing too, Marianna,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, colouring slightly. ‘He is very fond of the game, and very skilful.’

‘Most Italians are,’ replied Madame Baldovini, carelessly.

‘Gwen, my dear, look for Geraldine, will you?’ said Mrs. Faulkner; and Gwen left the room.

In about five minutes Geraldine entered, and soon after her Gwen and Ippolito. He had requested Gwen to stay and have a game with him, but she replied that she would rather not.

‘What! you only allow me to be your companion when you have no others at command, Miss Gwen,’

said Ippolito, with a mock air of being injured, and he followed, for he thought it dull to be left alone. Lady Rivers looked aghast when he entered.

‘Can this be your son?’ she asked, as Madame Baldovini introduced him.

‘Why not?’ said his mother with a smile.

‘Diane always spoke of the Count as a mere boy. I did not, therefore, expect to see a young man of his age and appearance.’

Madame Baldovini laughed heartily :

‘I know Diane always has been very odd on that subject. Now confess, Diane, did you not expect, when I drove up to your door, to see Ippolito asleep on my lap, and were you not speculating with alarm on all the probable tricks which the monkey might play ; for, of course, Italians are more mischievous by far than your good English boys?’

‘I certainly had forgotten how years had flown,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, not a little embarrassed. ‘I had not thought him so old as he is.’

‘I hope I have behaved with something of the discretion suiting my advanced age,’ said Ippolito, who occasionally condescended to utter a sentence of perfectly good English.

‘Your cousins would like to go to the school-room, Geraldine,’ remarked Lady Rivers, in the tone of command rather than of suggestion. (‘Surely he won’t think of going with them’), she inwardly added.

‘*Cugine !*’ cried Ippolito, in a tone of wonder, meant only for Geraldine’s ear ; but she replied with a haughty movement of her head, resolved that, whether he understood her English or not, her meaning should reach Lady Rivers.

‘Cousins ! not the least cousins in the world. Not the slightest relationship.

Then adding in a more good-humoured voice :

‘Come, girls, come with me. We shall find some way of amusing ourselves, I dare say.’

She led the way, explaining as they went : ‘There

is no school-room now, you must know. Gwen, indeed, studies here a good deal still, but it is our morning room, our boudoir, in fact—not our school-room.’

Geraldine, to her astonishment, perceived on turning to Agnes, that her lustreless eyes were full of tears.

‘Why, what is this?’ she exclaimed hastily. ‘What is the matter with you?’

‘Not the least relationship,’ repeated Agnes, in a melancholy voice; ‘I always thought you my cousin!’

‘Your sister, if you will,’ cried Geraldine, throwing her arms round her, and kissing her pale cheek. ‘Dear, dear Agnes, I did not say that for you, nor would I have said it for the world, if I had thought it could have hurt you. But,’ she added, looking towards Jemima, ‘I won’t be ordered by one who is not my aunt; that is what I meant. However, ‘commands are not constraints;’ a sentence I learned of you, Gwen, and much admire.’

‘It is not mine,’ replied Gwen, ‘a man said it.’

‘Well, a woman can act it,’ returned Geraldine.

When the Riverses were gone, Ippolito began to speak of the *Divin Agnese*.

‘Don’t dare to mock at Agnes,’ cried Geraldine, her eyes flashing, her cheeks crimson. ‘If you do, I shall think you have a very bad heart.’

‘But if it be only in order to see you look so beautifully indignant,’ said Ippolito, fixing his eyes on her with admiration.

‘Ippolito,’ continued Geraldine, eagerly, ‘when you think or speak of poor Agnes, of dear good Agnes, remember your pictures of St. Agnes and her lamb.’

‘My girls shall never go to Lascelles again while that young man is in the house,’ said Lady Rivers to herself, drawing up the carriage window, while Ippolito was yet making a graceful bow, and then throwing herself back into the corner of the carriage with the air of a person who has made a wise and inflexible resolution. By this action she escaped seeing the grimace with which the young Italian, prone to

mimicry, turned away as soon as he discovered in how bad a humour she was.

‘It is really intolerable to see how things are allowed to go on,’ continued Lady Rivers, sinking into a reverie which lasted some time, and from which she started to exclaim :

‘Jemima, what is that you are saying?’

‘Nothing, mamma,’ stammered Jemima, alarmed at the stern interrogation.

‘I heard you mention the Count’s name ;—some remark you made as to his being handsome. I beg that I may hear no more conversation in that style. I suppose you learnt it from Geraldine Eustace, but I have told you before that I always wish you to consider that very ill brought up young person as a warning, and not an example.’





CHAPTER XXVII.

And now, what change comes o'er her now ?
'Tis the pang that shoots like an icy dart
Through all the cells of her woman's heart.

Remains of W. S. WALKER.

PRUDENCE rather than justice made Mrs. Faulkner suggest that Geraldine and Gwen should take turns fairly in the drives which formed the morning's amusement. At first she gloried in her generalship, but ere long sustained a total defeat. Gwen greatly enjoyed these expeditions. It was a novelty to her to see and hear so much, and there was a season during which Ippolito, seated at her side, addressed her with as much alacrity as he did Geraldine, and with as great or greater appearance of deriving gratification from her remarks in return. He only betrayed to Geraldine his admiration of her beauty, but he spared no pains to show Gwen that he recognised her talents; the novel sensation of being rightly appreciated gave a fluency to her speech which it had never before possessed, and she replied to the lively sallies of her companion with wit more poignant than his own. The delight of these hours was increased if she found on her return that she still kept her ground in the presence of Geraldine. It failed to strike her for a time that Ippolito's adherence was more than once owing to a determination to pique Geraldine for her unprovoked announcement that she had done very well without them, and was quite sorry to see them back again so soon. 'I will punish

this impertinence ; she shall change her tone,' thought Ippolito, and he had not long to wait for his triumph.

Gwen began to suspect—vaguely at first—she could not but shut her eyes to the painful idea when it flashed across her—but being brave, opened them again, and boldly challenged that which caused her alarm. Was she merely an instrument in Ippolito's hands, played on by him for a purpose of his own ? With her usual self-command she closely scrutinised his conduct, without betraying her employment, and gained strong confirmation of her doubts. Her pride was wounded, her indignation roused ; perhaps a yet deeper feeling lay in her bosom. But to have evinced aught that could be construed as jealousy would have been almost death to Gwen. A change soon took place in Ippolito's behaviour which added fuel to her anger, and made it burn with a fierceness that she could not always conceal. Instead of welcoming her when her turn came, and half leading her to believe that he saw it arrive with something like preference, he grew sullen and silent when Geraldine was not of the party, and treated Gwen more than once with neglect bordering on rudeness, which she found it difficult to endure. Still she gave little token of her perception of the difference, beyond excusing herself when invited by Mrs. Faulkner to go out. Geraldine naturally took the vacant seat, and Mrs. Faulkner, seeing her child radiant with happiness, and enjoying to the full every circumstance of the hour, could not help feeling her own pleasure greatly heightened, and acknowledging that Geraldine presented a far more agreeable spectacle to her eyes than Gwen, with the troubled countenance which she had of late so often shown.

On a beautiful April day, without a cloud on the sky or a passing shower, abounding in the smiles, unstained by the tears of nature, Gwen was standing at an open window, looking down on the terrace beneath, already gay with spring flowers. The air was full of the songs of birds, and above their voices was heard the

ringing, musical laugh of Geraldine. To this, and this alone, Gwen was listening, so intently that she did not hear the door of the room open, and Catherine enter. Suddenly, with an impatient movement of her foot, she uttered one word,—‘*pavonneggiarsi*!’ Her tone was at once angry and deriding. A tremor passed over her diminutive frame as she spoke. Her lip curled and quivered. If Catherine understood not her word, she understood these accompaniments, and felt distress and agitation at the sight. Gwen’s quick ear caught the sound of her breathing. She turned and met her eye. It was not shame nor fear that came over her face, though her discovery of Catherine’s presence seemed to hold her as if rooted to the spot for a moment. The next she raised her hand, and beckoned her with a certain rapid movement of her fingers which she had learned of Ippolito. Leaning on the window-sill, she drew Catherine towards her, and pointed down to the terrace where Geraldine, in a beautiful silk dress which Mr. Faulkner had lately given her, of the colour of a pigeon’s neck, or of the face of the sea on a stormy day, when the beams of the sun play on it, was walking to and fro, sweeping majestically on, all glittering in her beauty and her finery; now stopping to gather a flower, now raising her white hands to her hair, and now reclining on the stone balustrade which edged one part of the terrace. All this while Baldovini remained in the alcove, holding a guitar in his hand, now and then striking a chord on it, and she talking and laughing with him. Whatever Catherine thought, she said nothing, and Gwen, in a choked voice, and unconsciously tightening her grasp on her companion’s arm as she spoke, exclaimed:

‘There! do you see that? A few weeks back it might have been Hugh!’

Catherine was angry with Geraldine, and ashamed. What refuge then did Truth leave to Love, save silence? In a moment Gwen spoke again:

‘Now tell me, Catherine, what does Geraldine make

you think of?—walking to and fro—all so gaudy and proud—what is she like? Go and ask Ippolito the meaning of that word I uttered just now, *pavonneggiarsi*! See what he answers, and if he does not know how well it fits Geraldine. So do you, Catherine. You pretend not to understand; I will tell you. To peacock oneself! Who can deny its application?

There was such bitter scorn in Gwen's manner, that Catherine could not help replying with quickness:

‘Well, Miss Gwen, if she has the beautiful feathers of the peacock, she has not its voice.’

She knew that was the right blow to hit, and she could not resist hitting it at that moment in defence of the child she cherished; Gwen, pale before, turned paler. Catherine suspected that in this outbreak there was yet more of self at work in Gwen's bosom than in the former battle which she had fought, as she averred, for Hugh. She could not but pity the girl as she stood before her, torn by conflicting feelings, though she regarded her with displeasure. Indeed, there had been a chill and a reserve in their intercourse from the day when Gwen had first allowed herself to speak with unrestricted censure of Geraldine. Catherine now addressed her gravely:

‘Miss Gwen, it was God that made Miss Geraldine so beautiful.’

‘And who was it,’ cried Gwen, passionately, the blood rushing up to her very eyes and forehead, ‘that made her so proud and so unfeeling towards those whom God has not made beautiful?’

At these words a sensation as of faintness came over Catherine, and she sat down on the window seat, resting her head on her hand. In another moment Gwen was kneeling before her, her face buried in her lap. Catherine felt very sad, and tears trickled down her cheeks. She could only breathe a prayer for these two young girls, who seemed to have much to try them in their own widely different natures and positions. As she prayed, she placed her hand on Gwen's head, for-

getting her anger, and commending her to God. Gwen felt her softened touch, and looked up, her large melancholy eyes pleading for pardon.

‘You,’ she said, ‘have been ever kind and true to me. You could see something to care for in the little plain girl who came from a home where she had been but too tenderly cherished. You loved me once, perhaps. You don’t love me now—you can’t. I have found out that —. Oh! Catherine, are you not frightened to see how wicked I am becoming—am become?’ She clasped her hands on her breast. ‘This heart how bad, how black it grows! My God! What feeling scome into it! Thou, Thou only knowest.’ She bowed down her head, and moved her body backwards and forwards as with the restlessness of agony.

‘Oh! Miss Gwen!’ cried Catherine, ‘this is not the way to behave. Try to find out what these evil feelings are, to struggle with, to control them.’

‘I will, indeed,’ she answered solemnly. ‘I will struggle and conquer, God being my helper. But I will not stay here any longer. I have more here than I can wrestle with. If I remain much longer, when I go home not even my mother will be able to love me. I must go—and soon—at once—don’t you think so, Catherine?’

‘Yes, Miss Gwen, I should think so, if it were possible. Had Mrs. Owen been in England, I should have thought so ever since—’

‘When?’ asked Gwen, anxiously.

‘Since that first day when you spoke so much against Miss Geraldine,’ replied Catherine, her displeasure reviving.

‘I said nothing then but what was true,’ returned Gwen, in a tone of mingled assertion and interrogation, ‘nor now. You know, Catherine, that no one really cares for me, or values me here. I would not demand more than justice, and it is precisely that which I do not obtain. Some people (her eye glanced involuntarily towards the garden), praise my talents and my accom-

plishments as if they were the only gifts to be admired ; I must be blind not to see that Geraldine's beauty eclipses them all. But it is not this that I complain of,' she added, hurriedly, as if vexed with herself for the allusion she had made ; ' why, however, should I stay here to complain at all ? I am sure Geraldine does not want me as a companion now, and she can spare me as a foil. No one will be the loser—no one will even miss me, unless you do, and you will not regret me, Catherine. Why should you *now* ?' She turned away, and softened into tears—a very few.

Catherine took her hand : ' Miss Gwen, it is true, that for your own sake—for more reasons than one, if you could go away now, at once—I should say go.'

' More reasons than one !' repeated Gwen, changing colour. ' What do you mean ?'

Catherine's only reply was : ' If your mother had a home, I should advise you to go to it. I think you are as well able now as you ever will be to begin your plan of tuition. But till her return I don't see what you can do.'

' I do,' said Gwen, promptly ; ' I have thought of something for myself.'

' Pray do not act in haste, Miss Gwen. It can scarcely be right for you to take any step without consulting Mrs. Faulkner.'

' I will consult her when the time comes for so doing ; that is not yet, Catherine. Trust me, I think I am right now.'

Gwen hastened to her own room to execute her project. This was to write to Dora. She told her that her mother would not be in London till May, but that she had a strong desire to quit Lascelles immediately, if possible ; and ' indeed, if I could put before you quite plainly every motive I have,—which most gladly would I do, if I ought—'

Gwen's pen stopped—' Is this true ?' she asked—' No, no, I could not ! I could not hide my face on Dora's bosom, and tell her *all*.'

She hastily erased the two lines, and began again. 'You would approve them. Can you assist me to effect this purpose? Can you point out any situation which I could undertake for these few weeks? Advise me to the best of your power—I may not speak more freely to you than I am speaking, but one thing more I must add, and entreat you to believe it (pray do not, through affectionate partiality, refuse to accept this truth); it is much more on account of fault in myself than of fault in any other, that I desire to quit this place. Weakness, beyond what you would expect to find, and many feelings worse than weak that you would grieve to detect, exist in me. But, Dora, you could scarcely grieve more than I do, and could I convince you how infirm is one who has too often prided herself on strength, you would say as she says to herself, 'fly—and look not for safety but in flight.''

Dora's answer was not long delayed. She wrote, 'Come to *me*, Gwen; come at once, and remain till your mother's home is ready for you.' There was further explanation to convince Gwen how wise and practicable this plan was, and how agreeable to Dora. Gwen was convinced, though at this moment she would, as far as she was herself concerned, rather have gone among strangers than subject herself to the deep seeing eye of a friend. 'A few weeks ago, how differently should I have welcomed the thought of a visit to Dora in her own home!' she said, with a sigh.

Catherine congratulated her heartily on this invitation, and she submitted it to Mrs. Faulkner. At another time it might have rendered her an object of envy, even to Geraldine, but now she seemed regardless of it.

'Good bye, Gwen, give my love to Dora,' was her leave-taking of her cousin, after her four years' domestication at Lascelles.

'God bless you, Miss Gwen,' were Catherine's few words, and Gwen knew that they were those of earnest prayer.

Mrs. Faulkner's speeches were very kind, but less profuse than ordinary. She seemed preoccupied—absent—unable to attend to Gwen. Madame Baldovini kissed her, and called her dear, and Gwen shrank away. To Ippolito she gave a hand as cold as ice, which he carelessly took, and as carelessly relinquished.

‘What a piece of marble,’ he said, with an expressive shrug as the door closed on her.

Geraldine contradicted him, because she always did contradict him. She was not thinking much of Gwen: ‘Marble!’ she said; ‘a coal of fire I should call her sooner. She is like a fever-fit—always hot or cold.’

Gwen threw herself back in the carriage, covered her face with her hands, and wept, as she had never wept before.

‘And this,’ she said, ‘is the looked-for day of quitting Lascelles!’





CHAPTER XXVIII.

E pur quel fasto, e quella
Sua fierezza m'alletta . . .
Il suo leggiadro viso
Non perde mai beltà :
Bello nella pietà
Bello è nell'ira.

METASTASIO.

THE day of Gwen's departure was a very stormy one with Geraldine and Ippolito. At the close of it, Ippolito went to his mother's room, threw himself into her arm chair, and exclaimed, after a moody silence of a few minutes :

'*Madre !* I adore this beautiful English girl.'

'Is this possible?' cried his mother, in a tone of surprise quite as natural as if it had been real, so perhaps it was real; how can we tell what was true and what assumed in Mme. Baldovini?

'Quite possible; it is so,' replied Ippolito, shortly. 'I can forgive her want of birth; she has the pride of a princess; who could ever guess that her extraction was plebeian. I shall take her to Italy, and glory in my bride.'

His mother surveyed him for a moment, as if she found something highly amusing in his language, then observed quietly :

'As to her extraction, there is no necessity for you to afflict yourself about that. Captain Eustace was the penniless son of a noble family—nor is that of her mother in the least plebeian. Thus, what appears to be

your solitary objection is easily removed ; now for your real difficulties. It would be well if those could be overcome with the same facility. You don't seem to have discovered them for yourself. Allow me to explain them.'

Ippolito, while his mother addressed him in this tone of irony, rose, and paced impatiently to and fro.

'When Mr. Faulkner, the wealthy English merchant, adopted this beautiful orphan as his daughter, no doubt he looked forward to her union with one of the nobles of his own land ; such *mésalliances* as you would term these, are of common occurrence here, and are considered mutually advantageous. To balance your scorn, I must explain to you that I have no doubt that Mr. Faulkner holds all foreigners in supreme contempt. Their old birth, their high titles, their long existing patrimonies, cannot retain respect while their coffers are exhausted. These are English prejudices. I don't know how you will overcome them. His first idea will be that you want his daughter's portion to prop up your poverty.'

'Mother, you wish to drive me mad. What are his money bags to me ?' demanded Ippolito, fiercely ; and taking another turn, he muttered to himself, 'if they have formed such insulting ideas of me, they have founded them on your greedy acceptance of every gift you could incite your hostess to offer.'

'What are his money bags to you ?' replied Madame Baldovini ; 'I should be very sorry to see you possess Geraldine without them.'

Ippolito stopped short before her : 'Mother, once for all, you must learn to know that I love her—my life depends on this.' His tone was that of real passion.

'I have often watched you with her, and thought you trifling.'

'Then you thought wrong,' said Ippolito, vehemently. 'She may trifle—but I—never—and let her trifle as she will, she must, she shall be mine. I have not told my love yet. She has listened to no accents such as

mine. I know not how often she may have heard the cold pleadings of her countrymen, but I am sure that the ice round her heart is unmelted, and the fire of my words shall—'

'Piano, piano,' interrupted his mother. 'It is a pity to waste this on me. This is all for Geraldine. It is pretty and poetical, and I dare say will avail with her—perhaps with Diane—but as to Mr. Faulkner—Now, my son, I must speak frankly, I doubt that this will prove a very vain idea. If you have no caution, no judgment—if you place no confidence where you owe it entirely, you will surely suffer defeat at your first step. Be patient—wait my directions—I do not promise that I will win the prize for you—but I will soon tell you what I think of the possibility of success.'

And now Madame Baldovini employed all her acuteness to discover a secret which had hitherto baffled and perplexed Lady Rivers, who never had been able to elicit from her brother anything like a plain declaration of what he meant hereafter to do for Geraldine Eustace.

Madame Baldovini easily extracted from Diane the fact that Geraldine was wholly without any provision save what Mr. Faulkner's generosity should make for her; in fact, during her widowhood she and her children had subsisted on a pension contributed by the noble relatives of Henry Eustace, and resigned most thankfully from the day that she became Mr. Faulkner's wife. Her brief trial of dependence was alluded to with tears in her eyes. Thenceforth Mr. Faulkner had treated Diane's children as his own, and Mary had repaid him with loving gratitude, while Geraldine had scarce ever bestowed a thought on the measure of her debt. Their mother had not taught gratitude to one child or carelessness to the other, yet that Geraldine was careless might be more justly attributed to her than that Mary was grateful.

Absent from home the greater part of his time,

ambitious, speculative, absorbed in business, Mr. Faulkner rarely expressed an opinion on the ordinary affairs of every day, but there were certain boundary lines which he allowed no one to transgress. People might live long with him without coming on one of these tracks, or learning their existence; Diane rather suspected than knew where they lay, and Geraldine was wholly unacquainted with them. Mr. Faulkner wore the appearance of giving 'with simplicity,' because he could not endure thanks. But when the time came for applying the test of deeds to those who were his debtors, no one felt more acutely than he the keenness of the tooth of ingratitude; he knew not how to pardon those who forgot his benefits when the hour for remembering them came.

Madame Baldovini had taken great pains to conciliate the favour of her host since she had been an inmate of Lascelles, and flattered herself that she had succeeded. She now strove to penetrate into his future designs for Geraldine. She soon ascertained that they were ambitious in no small degree, and in spite of his reserve and taciturnity, that his heart was set on the beautiful girl. From that time she recommended her son to relinquish the whole scheme. 'It never will succeed.' 'It must, it shall,' was Ippolito's reply.

Next she counselled patience, but he had none. And was not Geraldine on the point of being taken to London, to be seen, admired, sought after by all the world? The thought drove him mad. Love without jealousy was inconceivable to Ippolito, and he treated his mother with the fretful wrath of a spoilt child for many hours after her proposal.

Mrs. Faulkner was shocked at his disrespect.

'What a horrid temper you have,' said Geraldine.

Ippolito's eyes flashed: 'Have I not seen you a thousand times worse, and for no reason, or a child's reason?' he asked, tauntingly.

Geraldine coloured. 'And may I inquire,' she asked, with mock reverence, 'the very sufficient reason for

the *Signor Conte's* petulance? She had paused to select the most undignified term she could think of.

Ippolito caught her hand, looking earnestly in her beautiful face, and replied :

‘ You, you are the cause. Is that sufficient ?’

‘ What do you mean ?’ said Geraldine, angrily, and she drew away her hand. But Ippolito offered her no explanation.





CHAPTER XXIX.

Moi je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre.

MOLIÈRE.

NEXT day, when Geraldine paid her morning visit to her mother, she found her much discomposed.

‘Dearest mamma, you look quite vexed. What is it all about? I must know.’

‘Nothing, nothing, my darling. There—take away your arms; I can’t let you detain me here. People are all waiting for me at the breakfast table. Come, Geraldine, my dearest.’

‘Then there is something wrong, mother?’

‘No, no, I did not sleep very well—a mere trifle.’

‘I sha’n’t eat my breakfast till I know.’

‘Now don’t, my dear Geraldine, if you see me vexed, vex me more,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, imploringly.

And for once Geraldine yielded, and for once Mrs. Faulkner thought that Madame Baldovini certainly did talk too much, and was glad when she saw her unlock her writing-desk and begin what she called her immense correspondence. Geraldine and Ippolito went to idle in the music-room, and Mrs. Faulkner did not interfere with them because she wanted to have a talk with Catherine.

‘Do come here, Catherine,’ she said, throwing herself into an arm-chair. ‘I want to tell you something so vexatious, so annoying.’ The tears stood in her eyes.

‘My dear mistress,’ said Catherine, affectionately, approaching her, ‘I hope it is not anything very serious.’

‘Well, Catherine, you won’t call it so—at least, I don’t expect that you will,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, trying to smile; ‘but it is seriously annoying, if not worse. I may be more comfortable when I shall have talked it over with you.’

‘I hope you will, ma’am.’

‘What do you think Mr. Faulkner told me last night? I am sure Lady Rivers is at the bottom of it, and that vexes me, as well as poor Geraldine’s disappointment.’ Mrs. Faulkner could not refrain from prefacing the disclosure of her annoyance by assigning Lady Rivers as its cause, knowing this to be a very likely mode of insuring Catherine’s sympathy and awakening her indignation, for she entertained a steady antipathy to that lady’s system of interference, which she had seldom seen exercised with pure motives or in a good cause. ‘Mr. Faulkner says that he has quite made up his mind that Geraldine shall not be presented this spring. I was just speaking of the sensation I was sure she would cause, and mentioning how sensibly and firmly I had acted in refusing to take her out with us lately—quite with Madame Baldovini’s approbation, you know. He cut it all short, saying that it was not his design to take a house in town till next year, when Jemima Rivers would be ready to be presented too, for that Geraldine was too young and quite unfit to begin a season in London. It was so cruel of him to speak of the delicacy of my health and the great advantage of Lady Rivers’s society, as if I would trust my child to that odious woman—as if I were not capable of any exertion for her sake! The advantage, Catherine—only think—the advantage of having Lady Rivers with us!’

Catherine could plainly see the many advantages which were to accrue to Lady Rivers from this plan, but was not sure that it would be productive of any to her mistress or to Geraldine. She knew Mr. Faulkner too well to believe that he had spoken until he had resolved, or that, resolved, he would relinquish his

resolution. As there was a year's time to consider how to endure Lady Rivers's presence, and what benefit might be derived from it, Catherine's present impulse was to say:

'Do you think, ma'am, that Miss Geraldine will be very much disappointed at not going to London?'

'O! yes, poor child, her heart has long been set on it.'

'It is not exactly an affair of the heart, ma'am, is it? She likes pleasure, and gay dresses, and all those things very well, and is in a flutter at the expectation of them. But really, ma'am, I am afraid at times lest her heart should be set on something more serious.'

'What do you mean, Catherine?' said Mrs. Faulkner, turning red and pale, and in a half angry tone.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' replied Catherine, respectfully. 'I have tried to address you more than once; you have been aware of that, and surely you don't need anything that I could say to make you—'

'Pray speak plainly, Catherine. I can't bear this. How my head aches! This is sad teasing.'

'I am very sorry that your head aches; but I am afraid hearts will ache before long, ma'am. Can it be right for Miss Geraldine to have that young Italian Count always about her as he is since Miss Gwen's departure? It did not please me before, and now it is worse. I see a great deal going on that I do not like, but cannot check, otherwise than by pointing it out to you. The service of years, ma'am, must excuse me.'

'Oh! Catherine, don't talk of excuse. I know your motives—I know your devotion—but really,' said Mrs. Faulkner, changing from the warm, natural tone in which she had first addressed Catherine, to one of offended dignity—'Madame Baldovini is my oldest friend, and in what respect she and her son are not qualified to be the associates of me and my daughter, I cannot perceive; yet sometimes Lady Rivers, sometimes you, Catherine—'

'Ma'am, I do not wish to speak of Lady Rivers; I

cannot tell what her objections may be—mine are not to any ordinary intercourse ; but I should like to know—to lead you to answer the question to yourself at least—whether your friendship to Madame Baldovini will induce you to concur in her design of marrying her son to Miss Geraldine.’

‘Catherine, I really am excessively angry. This is more than I can permit. People must think I have great powers of endurance to harass me as they do ; but I can resent for others, if not for myself. Madame Baldovini is incapable of harbouring secret designs of any description ; she is perfectly open ; her nature all frankness ; her delicacy excessive. She would not stay a day under my roof if she believed me capable of suspecting her. But that I am not. I know her ; no one else can. It is very absurd that they should pretend to do so.’

‘I am aware, ma’am, that you and Madame Baldovini were girls together, and that you were fond of each other then ; but since, in all these intervening years, what has cemented this friendship ? There has been an occasional interchange of letters and many generous tokens of remembrance on your part ; beyond this—’

‘Really, Catherine, I cannot allow myself to be cross-questioned in this manner,’ interrupted Mrs. Faulkner.

‘Oh ! ma’am, pray do not use such wounding terms to one whom you urge to speak plainly, and at times invited to think herself—not so old a friend as Madame Baldovini, certainly, yet—’

‘Yes, yes, Catherine, I know it—the most proved, the truest friend I have—the one I could least afford to lose, and that by my own temper ! But you will forgive me—there—I know it—don’t say anything. To tell you the truth, I have been more vexed than I have known how to bear. Mr. Faulkner said, among other things, that the Baldovini had been here long enough now, and that the sole advantage of moving to

town would be to make them aware of this fact. Now Lady Rivers must have suggested this ; Augustus never would have thought of it.'

'I am sure I have !' replied Catherine.

'It is very unfeeling, very ungenerous,' said Mrs. Faulkner. 'As to the Count, of course he must admire Geraldine—everybody does ; and she perhaps is a little too fond of that sort of thing. I fancied once or twice that she was inclined to flirt with Hugh Owen, but really there was nothing at all in it.'

'Nothing,' replied Catherine, with a sigh.

'Nor in this.'

Catherine made no answer ; she saw that her cautions were ineffectual.

Geraldine opened the door.

'Mother, why are you here ? I feared you were ill. I remembered your looks this morning. You and Catherine both seem vexed now. I must know, without more delay, what this means.'

Mrs. Faulkner and Catherine were taken by surprise ; it was not possible to admit Geraldine into their confidence, and Mrs. Faulkner saw no refuge except in returning to the original source of annoyance and subject of the conversation.

'My dear child, I did look vexed this morning, it is true ; but it depends on you whether the vexation be great or small ; I shall feel it just as you do ; I fear only your disappointment.'

'In what way ?' cried Geraldine, looking from one to the other ; she changed colour, and feared she knew not what ; an indistinct thought of Ippolito rushed through her mind.

'Your papa has taken a resolution with which I am only to-day acquainted. I fear it will be useless to attempt to prevail on him to change it.'

'What is it ?' demanded Geraldine, with impatience.

'He thinks that you are too young to be presented this year ; in fact, he has made up his mind that it will be much better for you to wait for his niece till

next season, and there is an end of our going to own.'

At her mother's first words Geraldine had felt only relief, but gradually her countenance clouded, and she exclaimed, after a pause :

'Wait for Jemima ! What have I to do with her ? She walked to the window and then back again : 'This is all Lady Rivers.'

Mrs. Faulkner did not speak.

'What right has she to interfere ? I never obeyed her, and I never will.'

'My dear, it is your father who determines. He thinks, too, that my health is delicate, and that it will be an assistance to have her.'

'She to live with us ! Then I would not go ; I would never go out with her—never ! Oh ! mamma, do you think I could endure her?—scolding me for ever, and making harm out of everything I do. I would rather be shut up all my life than go anywhere with Lady Rivers, and you may tell papa so if you like. Now if it were Madame Baldovini, I should not mind that so much. Why could not she stay with us in London as she does here ?'

Mrs. Faulkner shook her head despondently.

'Why not, mamma ? It is just what you would enjoy.'

'It would not suit your father ; you know he does not like foreigners.'

'What prejudice—what injustice ! But he does like Madame Baldovini, I am sure, and she is no foreigner ; and as to her son, I suppose he is not to be disliked merely because he is an Italian, is he ?'

'Oh ! I don't mean that he dislikes either of them ; I am sure that he has been most kind to them as my friends ; but really he does not intend that we should go to town this year.'

'What ! I am to be sacrificed to Lady Rivers's ill nature and unkindness,' replied Geraldine, bursting into tears.

‘Oh ! my dear child ! I can’t bear this,’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, embracing her.

‘But you must bear it,’ sobbed Geraldine, ‘for I shall cry till you prevail on papa to give up this piece of tyranny.’





CHAPTER XXX.

I am amazed at your passionate words.

I scorn you not.

SHAKESPEARE.

CONSISTENTLY with her threat, Geraldine came down stairs with eyelids red and swollen, ate her luncheon in silence, and could scarcely take anything that was offered to her without fresh tears. Madame Baldovini regarded her with commiseration, and directed inquiring glances towards her mother, who did not venture to make any reply to them. Ippolito said nothing; he watched with real anxiety his opportunity to ask of her, and her only, the cause of her grief.

‘Will you drive with us, Geraldine?’ asked her mother.

‘Certainly not,’ replied Geraldine, and she quitted the room to return to her own.

‘Does not Ippolito accompany us?’ asked Mrs. Faulkner, uneasily, as she seated herself in the carriage beside Madame Baldovini.

‘I suppose so; where is he? How intolerable of him to keep us waiting, my dear! Where can he be?’

Mrs. Faulkner desired the servant to seek the Count; he returned after a fruitless endeavour to find him. He was not in the house.

‘Oh! he will amuse himself,’ said his mother; ‘pray don’t think any more of him.’ And they drove off.

Geraldine’s head ached with crying. She strolled into the garden.

‘They are all gone out to enjoy themselves. No one

cares for me.' And she began to weep again. Ippolito was standing beside her, when, startled by a footstep, she removed her handkerchief from her eyes. She looked amazed, frightened, pleased.

'Geraldine,' he exclaimed, passionately, 'what occasions your grief?'

'I thought you were gone,' said Geraldine, turning from him.

'Gone! leave you in this state! I would die sooner; all the morning I deplored your absence. I did not venture to ask where *la Giralda* was,—and then to see you return so unlike yourself—'

'I cannot explain things to you,' replied Geraldine, hurriedly; 'I could never make you understand why I am vexed. What I could tell, would appear childish; what I can't tell, is what I feel here.' She put her hand on her heart.

'You think it impossible for me to feel for you—you reject my sympathy?'

'Indeed I do not, for I have no other,' answered Geraldine, the pearly drops forming again on her long lashes. Ippolito thought that he had never seen her look so lovely before. Geraldine now tried to make him comprehend her grievance, and to explain Mr. Faulkner's cruel decree. She had said that she did not expect Ippolito to enter into half the reasons which made her feel so angry, but still less had she anticipated the flash of delight which lit up his countenance as he first gathered the import of her words.

'You too, then, find pleasure in seeing me plagued!' she exclaimed, breaking off indignantly.

'And you,' replied Ippolito, 'could you for a moment suppose that what you now announce would grieve me? Do I not thus escape the torment of knowing you to be surrounded by a thousand adorers? Here you have but one, and these tears show how little that one contents you. Soon you will banish me hence, I doubt not. My happiness will find a tomb, but I rejoice that you cannot wreath it with flowers; you will weep when I

am gone, though not for me. Why, Geraldine, this startled look? Do not pretend to have been blind to my love. It has been your pride to crush every expression of it.'

'I don't know what you mean; I thought you were dull because Gwen was gone; you always cared more for her than for me.'

'Gwen!' exclaimed Ippolito, in a tone of the utmost scorn, 'you know that I have not had a thought or feeling but for you from the first hour I saw you.'

With Geraldine and with her mother, time passed very differently. Mrs. Faulkner, harassed by ill-defined anxieties, brought her drive to as speedy a termination as possible. She could not listen to Madame Baldovini's unembarrassed conversation, she could not rest till she had regained her home, and pleading a headache, hastened up stairs, relieved not to encounter Geraldine in the way. But Geraldine was in her room awaiting her, and gave her no respite.

'Pray do not ring for Collinson. I must have you all to myself.' And she poured forth a revelation of the love which Ippolito had always felt for her, and which now she knew was the sole thing on earth that she valued.

'My child! what is it that you tell me?' exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner, sitting the very image of consternation and of woe.

'Oh! mother, mother,' cried Geraldine, hiding her face in her mother's lap, 'why do you look on me thus, when I tell you that I am so happy?'

'My dear child!' said Mrs. Faulkner, bending over her and bursting into tears; 'your father will never listen to this for one moment.'

Geraldine started up, and regarded her mother with astonishment.

'What do you mean? Not listen! what can you mean? When have you or he ever denied me anything necessary to my happiness? Would he kill me? Would you let him kill me?'

‘No, no, I don’t mean that,’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, in extreme alarm. ‘But he would see so many objections to a foreign marriage for you. I am sure he would never let it be. Ippolito and you must not think of this any more.’

‘Not think of it! We will think of nothing else, live for nothing else.’

‘Oh! Geraldine, why did you not speak to me sooner?’

‘I could not,’ replied Geraldine, bending down her head, and burying her blushing face in her hands; ‘I could not. I never knew whether I loved him or hated him. He tormented me. I was miserable. But now! I am very happy.’ And she looked up, her face radiant with its youthful joy.

‘Oh! mother, surely you love Ippolito?’ She caught her hand; then relinquishing it, incensed at the delay of her mother’s reply, she added: ‘Not that I care who loves or who loves him not. I love him. That suffices him, and it suffices me.’

‘This is all very wrong—and very dishonourable in Ippolito,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, rashly.

‘Dishonourable?’ repeated Geraldine, with indignation. ‘What has dishonour to do with Ippolito? Why should I not be proud to be his wife?’

‘His wife! what, and leave us! I who have so idolised you,—and all for a child’s fancy?’

‘I am no child now,’ said Geraldine, proudly; ‘and the sooner I make myself understood the better.’

Mrs. Faulkner threw her arms round Geraldine’s neck, and burst into tears.

‘Geraldine, Geraldine, this must not be. It is all folly, worse than folly, and I have exposed you to it. Mr. Faulkner will never forgive me. He will never hear of it; and remember, you owe him the love, the gratitude, the submission due to a father.’

‘I should owe him very little love or gratitude if he were to try to deprive me of that on which my happiness depends; and submission I do not owe him.’

Mrs. Faulkner looked aghast.

‘Since when, Geraldine, has such an idea as this come into your head?’

Geraldine hid her face for a moment, as if gathering up courage to look on the thought steadily. Then throwing back her head, she replied proudly and passionately:

‘Since you placed him who is not my father between me and Ippolito.’

‘Ungrateful, rebellious child! Mr. Faulkner has been the best of parents to you, the most generous; moreover, he is your guardian, and to him any rash proposals of this young man must be submitted.’

Geraldine laughed scornfully.

‘Unfeeling girl!’ sobbed Mrs. Faulkner. ‘I then am not to be regarded as a mother.’

‘Yes, yes, always the kindest—the fondest. But can you, who never have denied me yet anything that it was yours to grant, now torture me—now set a tyrant over me? No, no, I will not believe it.’

‘A tyrant, Geraldine! What a word to apply to my husband, who all your life has taught you to forget that you were fatherless!’

Geraldine felt some shame, some compunction.

‘But I always —’ she exclaimed, and stopped short.

It was prudence that checked her; she was about to give utterance to a sentiment which, if avowed, she saw might be employed against her. ‘I was always afraid of papa,’ would have been the sentence completed. ‘No, no,’ she said to herself, ‘I will show no fear; I will feel none.’

‘The moment that Mr. Faulkner comes,’ said her mother, who had gathered boldness from the slight change in Geraldine’s manner, ‘he must be informed of everything. All must be placed in his hands, unless indeed I can prevail on you to dismiss this nonsense for yourself, which would be far better.’

There was a knock at the door, given by Sarah, Collinson’s niece, who had been allowed to effect an

entrance at Lascelles, as an attendant on Madame Baldovini. That lady begged to know if she could speak to Mrs. Faulkner before post time.

‘Yes, I will come to her—in her room?’

‘If you please, ma’am.’

Glad to escape from Geraldine, and imploring her to reflect quietly on all she had said, Mrs. Faulkner hastened to Madame Baldovini, whom she found seated at her desk. She closed it immediately, rose, took Mrs. Faulkner’s two hands, and led her to the sofa. No one could be more troubled than Mrs. Faulkner, no one more inwardly cool than Madame Baldovini.

‘My dear Diane, I find these children have been talking nonsense to each other.’ She fixed her black eyes keenly on her.

‘I really don’t half know what it means,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, somewhat relieved to find Madame Baldovini possessed of the subject.

‘It means that Ippolito has fallen desperately in love with Geraldine; not very wonderful, seeing how charming she is.’

Mrs. Faulkner seemed ready to faint.

‘I am very grieved,’ she faltered. ‘I confess I did not foresee. It is most unfortunate.’

Madame Baldovini looked surprised :

‘My dear Diane, do I find this a subject of regret or even astonishment to you? Pardon me if I appear struck by inconsistency; the happiness of my child is at stake. Why, oh, why have you cruelly exposed him to your daughter’s fascinations if such were your feelings?’

‘I know I am quite to blame,’ was poor Mrs. Faulkner’s only explanation.

‘I believe that my son’s rank and birth entitle him to address any lady however noble. As to himself—I may be partial, certainly, but here Geraldine and I are of one mind. Poor child, I am sure from the first moment that I saw her, my sentiments towards her were quite those of a mother, and indeed till to-day I

had thought that yours were no less warm in favour of Ippolito.' It was now Madame Baldovini's turn to conceal her face in her handkerchief.

'My dear Marianna,' began Mrs. Faulkner, greatly touched, 'I can quite understand your feelings—be as angry with me as you will—but it were vain for me to make concessions which Mr. Faulkner would require me to retract. I know his opinions, his prejudices if you will—the difference of country, of religion, of habits—oh! these objections are insuperable, indeed I feel they are.' Mrs. Faulkner became far more fluent as soon as she had shielded herself behind her husband, and hurried on: 'I have been very imprudent—I went on fancying them children. Forgive me if you can.'

'I could forgive any injury to myself,' replied Madame Baldovini, proudly, 'but to my son—and as to his being a child,—if you were to see, to hear him—'

'Oh! no!' cried Mrs. Faulkner, shrinking with horror.

'Then I am to understand that Geraldine is Mr. Faulkner's adopted daughter—that his authority is indisputable—that you anticipate disapproval, and therefore you decline showing any countenance to their wishes?'

'Indeed I can't,' said Mrs. Faulkner, evasively. 'And if your son would believe what I say—would spare himself and Mr. Faulkner the pain, the uselessness of any further appeal——'

At this moment Ippolito opened the door between his mother's room and his own. At the sight of Mrs. Faulkner he started, then advanced towards her with a face of anything but despondency.

'Ah! Madame Faulkner,' he exclaimed, in French, 'am I not truly presumptuous? I cannot have a moment's repose till you have forgiven me.' Mrs. Faulkner found herself constrained to listen to the eloquent description of his passion for Geraldine, and

his entreaties for her own favour. '*Et puis, elle m'aime !*'

He uttered these words in tones of exultation, which Mrs. Faulkner could scarcely have borne to destroy, but that they brought vividly before her the idea of parting with Geraldine ; in that fear she forgot compassion for Ippolito, and exclaimed :

'No, no—she is a child—she does not know what she says.'

'Geraldine knew well what she said,' replied Ippolito, haughtily, 'when she accepted my heart and gave me her own. That I ought never to have offered the one or asked the other, unsanctioned by you, I acknowledge—I come to beg your forgiveness.'

'Oh ! you have that—indeed you have. It is myself I cannot forgive.'

'Yourself?' repeated Ippolito, with surprise.

'It will be difficult to make my son understand the feelings which the expression of his attachment to your daughter awakens,' said Madame Baldovini, with stateliness.

'I am afraid it will,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, without resentment, and with real regret. 'I am afraid that I cannot make either of you understand how it grieves me to seem unkind, unfriendly. I shall never be able to explain,' she said, turning to Ippolito, 'how impossible all this appears to our English ideas. Mr. Faulkner—'

'But surely Mr. Faulkner is not the chief person to be consulted here,' interrupted Ippolito.

'Assuredly he is,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, flying to her only place of refuge. Madame Baldovini also was alarmed at the imprudence of her son, and interposed :

'In that case it would be a poor return for the generous hospitality which we have received from him, to pursue this point any further without his knowledge. You see that Ippolito did not understand your daughter's position. Our plain duty now is to ascertain Mr. Faulkner's sentiments.'

At this moment Catherine called her mistress from the room. 'Madam, here is a letter from Mr. Faulkner. I went to your apartment with it—I found Miss Geraldine in hysterics—I have done all I could for her—she insists on seeing you.'

Mrs. Faulkner did not show that alarm which she would have displayed on another occasion. She broke the seal of her letter, and glanced her eye over it.

'It is only that he is detained in London to-day. I will tell them so before I come to Geraldine, poor child,' and she re-entered the room she had quitted.

'Mr. Faulkner will not be here to-night. We shall have time to consider what is best to do—but now I must go to Geraldine.'

'I have considered,' said Madame Baldovini, promptly; 'we cannot too soon relieve you from the embarrassment of our presence. Lascelles is no place for us in this uncertainty. We will quit it at once, if you please. Could you allow us to go to town this evening? We have a friend who will receive us.'

Ippolito, who was walking up and down, stopped short, and started. His mother implored silence by a glance.

'This is very painful,' said Mrs. Faulkner.

'My dear Diane,' replied Madame Baldovini, 'not half so painful as remaining here.'

'Oh! then it must be as you like. I will order the carriage immediately.' And she went away.

'Why is this?' demanded Ippolito, angrily.

'For your good,' replied his mother, gaily. 'Anima! We shall return. I don't esteem the day lost; but it is mere waste of time to stay here, with this weak, silly woman, who cannot answer for herself for five minutes together. It was quite a sudden thought of mine to go to London. I will see Mr. Faulkner myself before he has had any consultation with his wife. I shall try my power—I don't despair.'

Madame Baldovini had also come to the decision that her son should not see Geraldine again until she

had ascertained what ground could be gained with Mr. Faulkner. If his prejudices were invincible, she hoped to carry Ippolito away from the scene of danger. But it was only by getting him now to London that she could retain the slightest hope of effecting this purpose. 'If I gain the victory with this stiff old merchant (and I may), we will return here in triumph; if not, I must take Ippolito to Paris, for really he is quite mad now. Besides, I don't think I could bear Diane's sentiment and her remorse all through this evening.'

She reconciled Ippolito to her view of the subject, and made her preparations for departure with alacrity.





CHAPTER XXXI.

. . . from hours of weary waking
I'll to my dreams—still in my sleep
To feel the spirit's restless aching,
And e'en with eyelids closed to weep.

Poems by F. A. BUTLER.

‘CATHERINE, what am I to do?’ Mrs. Faulkner poured forth her distress to her faithful servant.

‘Let Madame Baldovini and her son go, by all means,’ was Catherine’s prompt reply. ‘I will order the carriage, and attend to their departure; and pray don’t give any hint of it to Miss Geraldine.’

‘Oh! Catherine, this is very cruel.’

‘But, ma’am, do you intend to yield?’

‘I can’t; and there is Mr. Faulkner—but my poor child—I must go to her,’ and she hastened away.

‘Mrs. Faulkner desired me to ask at what hour you would like the carriage for London,’ said Catherine, addressing Madame Baldovini respectfully.

Ippolito threw himself on a chair.

‘In an hour, if you please,’ replied Madame Baldovini, somewhat disconcerted by the calmness which she had now to encounter. Meantime Mrs. Faulkner was sorely buffeted by the tempest of Geraldine’s angry sorrow. It seemed to her that hours elapsed between the ordering of the carriage and the moment of departure, although, really, Madame Baldovini’s arrangements were made with wonderful celerity.

Geraldine started up from a silence that her mother had hoped was slumber.

‘Carriage wheels!’ she said; ‘it can’t be papa—it is too early. You will not admit any one else? Only think, if it were Lady Rivers.’ And she threw herself again on her face.

‘No one will be admitted—I am sure of it.’

Geraldine stretched out her arm and rang the bell. She suspected some mystery. Her mother trembled, but did not dare to move.

‘What carriage is at the door?’ asked Geraldine, imperatively, of the servant who answered the bell.

‘The carriage for Madame Baldovini,’ said the woman, perplexed.

‘Mother,’ said Geraldine, as the door closed, ‘did you think of being so barbarous as to let him leave me without my knowing it even?’

And she sprang from the sofa, and began hastily arranging her disordered dress, Mrs. Faulkner standing helpless by. Catherine entered, and perceived in a moment Geraldine’s design. She closed the door, and said:

‘Ma’am, surely you will forbid Miss Geraldine to see the Count again without Mr. Faulkner’s knowledge. This cannot be right.’

Geraldine’s eyes flashed: ‘Am I to be ruled by a servant?’ she demanded.

‘Oh! Geraldine, be persuaded by me,’ returned her mother, imploringly.

Geraldine darted to the window, and threw it wide open. The carriage was driving off. She uttered a piercing scream.

‘Oh! Catherine, she will throw herself out,’ cried Mrs. Faulkner, all past scenes of violence rushing across her mind. The girl turned with a look of anguish that pierced both their hearts. ‘You will repent this,’ she said, and fell fainting in Catherine’s arms. When she recovered, she found herself on her bed, her mother and Catherine beside her. She looked

on them wildly for a few minutes, struggling with the strange obliteration of remembrance that follows a swoon—retracing with ease the events of yesterday, but perfectly unable to recal those of the last hours. But she regained consciousness only too soon, as her look of misery expressed. Shaking her head impatiently at some fond entreaty on her mother's part, she said :

‘Oh ! that a mother's love should turn all to falsehood, and that I should live to see it !’

Then, with a mixture of despair and anger, she turned from them, and nothing would induce her to speak or eat that evening.

Mrs. Faulkner, alike unhappy and alarmed, in turn reproached herself and Catherine, who heard and answered her with patience.

‘Why did you not force me to open my eyes earlier ? Why did you not sooner speak with all the plainness of this morning ? It was too late then.’

‘Much too late, ma'am,’ said Catherine, with a sigh ; ‘but indeed, it was not my first attempt.’

‘And poor Madame Baldovini ; I have behaved vilely to her, too—turning her out of my house in this manner—and why ? All for the consequences of my own sad folly. There is not one of them whom I dare look in the face—certainly not my poor Geraldine. Oh ! Catherine, she drove me away from her bed-side ; you must go and take the place which ought to be mine.’ Mrs. Faulkner clasped her hands and shed tears.

‘It is true I am spared a meeting with Mr. Faulkner this evening, but it is a mere respite—it must come to-morrow.’

‘Indeed, ma'am, I think you will be much happier if you take Mr. Faulkner's advice about all this as soon as you can have it.’

Mrs. Faulkner sighed.

‘I am sure that he will blame me severely ; I must bear that. I see now the reasonableness of his sug-

gestions yesterday. I fancied that they came from Lady Rivers, and that made me set myself against them.'

'Oh! ma'am, pray get rid of such suspicions; speak quite plainly to him; his judgment is all you have to rely on now, and when he sees how much you blame yourself, he can't but be sorry for you; and I do hope—'

'What, Catherine—that he will consent?'

'Oh! no; I did not think of that. I can't forget the real objections which exist—the difference of country and of faith; and the young Count seems to have a very violent temper. I cannot suppose that Madame Baldovini has brought him up well.'

Mrs. Faulkner blushed to hear the condemnation which Catherine's plain sense involuntarily passed on the woman whom she had allowed to flatter her unrestrainedly for some weeks past.

'I meant,' said Catherine, 'that I hope Mr. Faulkner will not forget that Miss Geraldine has been used to the greatest indulgence. I don't think severity will do well, employed of a sudden.'

'Catherine, I am dreadfully alarmed for her. Do see if you can persuade her to take something. I dare not approach; it only makes her angry.'

It was true that Geraldine hid her face at the sight of her mother, and repulsed her by words and gestures. This made Mrs. Faulkner wretched. While Catherine watched with soothing silence by her child, she was left in solitude, which became insupportably oppressive to her. She was not one who could 'suffer and be still.' She liked to talk her misery away, and now there was no ear to listen to her lamentations.

'Oh, heart! oh, heavy heart!
Why sighest thou without breaking?
Because thou canst not ease thy smart
By friendship nor by speaking.'

Suddenly the thought occurred to her that she would write a letter to Madame Baldovini. 'I am sure that I ought to do all I can to soften this to her.'

Mrs. Faulkner always found consolation in her pen. She wrote a long epistle, longer than was likely to be wise, but she said that she was much happier after she had completed it. It was certainly a very kind letter, full of generous offers of everything except retractation, and rested emphatically on her conviction that Mr. Faulkner's objections to the marriage would be insuperable. She ventured to steal into Geraldine's room before she went to bed, and to look upon her child. Geraldine had known many periods of passionate grief, but few of real heartfelt sorrow. There had been her days of mourning for Mary; there had been many a storm for trifling provocations. Something whispered to Mrs. Faulkner's inmost heart what she was loath to hear—that Geraldine was not trifling now. She slept; she had wept herself to sleep. One white arm was thrown over her head; her golden hair had escaped all bands. She looked very beautiful, and very sorrowful too. Her mother, who dared not rouse her by a kiss, turned away sadly, slowly, to seek a couch made torturing not only by the thorns of present anxiety, but by the pangs of awakening remorse, which began to mutter in her ear that she had many a cause of self-reproach in the past heavier than this recent act of egregious imprudence. She could not silence conscience as she had often silenced the voice of importunate friendship. She could not say, 'How cruel at such a moment to recal the follies, the errors which cannot be retrieved?' Nor cry, 'These recriminations may be just; I dare say they are, but they are very ill-timed and injudicious.' The only thought of comfort she could fix on was that Geraldine slept, and therefore must, after all, be less wretched than herself.





CHAPTER XXXII.

Io non distinguo
Se prego o minaccio.

METASTASIO.

GERALDINE rose exhausted with the violence of the past evening, and the restless night which had followed the brief slumber in which her mother had seen her. Towards her she persisted in haughty silence. Of Catherine she inquired :

‘Have you learned why papa did not come last night?’

‘He was merely detained, as he sometimes is, by business. He will be here this evening as usual, no doubt.’

Geraldine, like others, was speculating on an appeal to Mr. Faulkner. Presently she rose, the colour mounting on her cheek, her lip quivering.

‘What is it you are seeking, my dear child?’ said Catherine, with all the fondness she had shown her in many an hour of childish trouble.

‘Let me alone—don’t touch me,’ was Geraldine’s suffocated reply, and she broke from her and went in search of her mother, whom she had not voluntarily approached before that day. She knelt down beside her, took one of her hands, and, in a slow, impressive half-choked voice, and with a tearless eye, she said :

‘Now hear me, mother. If you in any way prejudice papa against Ippolito—if you try to persuade him to meet us with an arbitrary denial—if you kill all our hopes of happiness with this your own hand’ (and she cast her mother’s hand from her), ‘I tell you I

never will forgive you. Mother, I never *could* love you again !

The unhappy girl clasped her hands on her breast, and with head bent low, as if considering with herself, she continued, in a tone of thrilling anguish, 'I don't know now that I can ever love you as I did yesterday morning.'

'Geraldine !' exclaimed her mother, with a sharp cry of pain.

Geraldine seemed startled, moved, and called out of herself :

'Well, mother,' she said, 'if you were to undo all you have done—if he were here again beside me, and did not look as if he had been so very miserable as I have been—perhaps I might forget these horrible hours !'

Mrs. Faulkner had despatched her epistle to Madame Baldovini, and towards evening obtained a reply, which she read thrice over, and at last laid it down again, still with a perplexed look.

'What did I write ?' she asked herself. 'If I could but see my letter ! What can I have said ?'

Perhaps her mind would not have been much clearer if she had re-examined her letter. Certainly Madame Baldovini had somewhat wrested the sense of it, and Diane might not by any scrutiny have been able to discern how her friend discovered so plainly as she said she did, that the feelings of a mother, and of a high and generous nature, brought their hearts into perfect unison.

'Concern for the happiness of our children; that is the sole pulse that throbs in either. I never have for a moment feared that the prejudices (you must forgive the too frank expression) of that excellent, upright, princely-minded man, Mr. Faulkner, once overcome, Ippolito's happiness, bound up indissolubly as it is with Geraldine's, would suffer any injury from your opposition.' As to the point of Mr. Faulkner's decided negation, Madame Baldovini meant

to ascertain that for herself. She must see him—must clear herself and her son from the slightest imputation of having forgotten his claims on their gratitude. She was just about to seek an interview which ‘will be terminated by the time that you read this, dearest friend.’

The whole letter was skilfully written. Madame Baldovini was very skilful, and thought yet to prevail with Mr. Faulkner.

Diane was not without a similar apprehension; but the first sound of her husband’s footstep as he entered the house, told her that he had defied all arts of persuasion. She exchanged her causeless terror for a better grounded dread of his severity. He hastily came into the room in which she was sitting; Geraldine, warned, implored by Catherine not to incense, had not dared to await him.

‘Come with me,’ he said shortly, to Mrs. Faulkner, and she rose, trembling so violently that she could scarcely walk, and followed him like a culprit.

‘Diane, what folly have you been guilty of!’ asked her husband, in a tone such as she had never heard before, as soon as they had reached his library and closed the door.

‘I don’t know,’ began Mrs. Faulkner, faintly, resting her hand on the table, and looking as if she would sink to the ground.

Mr. Faulkner pushed a chair towards her.

‘Sit down. You do know. Add no falsehood to folly. I was aware of the latter, and have trifled with it too long. The former, I hoped, was not in your nature. Do not let me find myself mistaken.’

‘Pray—pray, speak more plainly,’ said Mrs. Faulkner; she would fain have added ‘more gently.’

‘More plainly!’ repeated Mr. Faulkner, with a short angry laugh. ‘Are you not perfectly aware that your precious friend, Mme. Baldovini, came to me to-day to ask *me* to allow your daughter to marry her son?—that is, to ask me to portion her richly for this purpose.

What your sentiments were, she said, she had no doubt, but your reliance on my judgment and generosity was so implicit that you would not utter a word until this appeal had been made.'

'Indeed, Marianna's maternal feelings have misled her——'

'Very probably,' replied Mr. Faulkner, scornfully; 'but beneath your eye has this folly been carried on, and am I to believe that up till this time you have been in the dark concerning it?—and if not, with what candour did you gainsay my words of a few days since?'

'I was blind—miserably blind. I solemnly assure you, Augustus, you cannot blame me as I blame myself. It is dreadful to see these poor young creatures so unhappy!—'

'These silly children!—for the contemptible training which they have received has left them both the children which they ought not to be.'

'Geraldine is only seventeen.'

'Too young a great deal to be allowed to become the victim of her own or others' folly.'

'Too tender not to be treated very tenderly,' cried Mrs. Faulkner, bursting into tears.

Mr. Faulkner looked on her only with anger.

'For the present,' he said, 'I take her treatment into my own hands, and therefore beg you to do me the favour to acquaint me precisely with all you know on this foolish subject.'

Poor Mrs. Faulkner could with difficulty collect her ideas, and command her words, while her husband walked up and down the room, his head bent forward, his brow knit, his whole demeanour one of inflexible determination. Once she paused, gasping for breath, her heart throbbing almost audibly. When she began again, she varied a little from her first statement. Mr. Faulkner stopped her sternly:

'No prevarication, if you please.'

Mrs. Faulkner coloured:

‘This imputation I do not deserve.’

‘Go on,’ said Mr. Faulkner. She obeyed.

At the conclusion, Mr. Faulkner seemed a little mollified ; in a gentler tone than he had yet employed, he said :

‘You may go now, Diane. Do not communicate to Geraldine any part of what has passed between us. I will speak to her myself this evening. If you disregard this injunction you will seriously displease me, and injure her. Indeed, I should advise you not to discuss this subject again with her, either before or after I shall have told her my decision.’

‘It is not possible to carry acquiescence so far,’ replied Mrs. Faulkner, emboldened by a feeling of despair. ‘Where is my child to weep, but on my bosom?’

‘At least,’ said Mr. Faulkner, with returning sternness, ‘if it must be your office to dry the tears which your folly has caused to flow, be mindful not to check them by any infusion of false hopes of change in me. My decision is irrevocable.’





CHAPTER XXXIII.

A un passo estremo

Non costringermi, O Padre. Io mi protesto

Farei . . . chi sa ?

Dì . . . che faresti, ingrata ?—

Tutto quel che farebbe una disperata.

METASTASIO.

AT dinner, Mr. Faulkner was the only person whose demeanour was not perceptibly altered. Mrs. Faulkner looked ready to faint. When her husband spoke, which appeared to her oftener than usual, she answered with a nervous precipitation, and generally wide of the purpose, provoking an impatient gesture, or an angry interjection in return. Geraldine glanced first at one then at the other, with a half alarmed, half resentful air; it was only by a great effort that she remained in the room, and a burning spot of colour settled on her cheek.

Such a repast was worthy to have been eaten in purgatory. At length it was over. Mrs. Faulkner rose, and Geraldine with her.

‘My dear Geraldine, stay here,’ said Mr. Faulkner, clearing his throat.

Mrs. Faulkner tottered. Geraldine saw this, and sprang to her side.

‘Mamma is ill. I will lead her to the other room.’

Mr. Faulkner approached, with anger in his eye. He caught Mrs. Faulkner’s wrist, and uttered in a voice meant only for her :

‘No scenes, I beg.’ But he saw that she was really ill. He supported her himself, and said to Geraldine :

‘Call Catherine to the drawing-room; I will take your mother there.’

When Catherine and Geraldine returned, Mrs. Faulkner was stretched on the sofa, Mr. Faulkner standing by her with a glass of water in his hand. She revived in a few minutes, opened her eyes, and looked mournfully on her daughter, who watched her with eagerness.

‘My child, I am better now. Catherine will stay with me; go with your father.’

‘Not while you are ill,’ replied Geraldine, bending over her affectionately, and kissing her forehead. Her mother felt a tear fall on it.

‘Go, go, pray go,’ she repeated, faintly.

‘Your mother ought to be perfectly quiet,’ said Mr. Faulkner. ‘Catherine will know best what to do for her. Come with me.’

Geraldine followed him. They resumed their seat.

‘Geraldine,’ said Mr. Faulkner, after a pause which he felt it painful to break, yet knew that it was cruel to prolong, ‘I have a few words to say to you on an occurrence which has caused me much dissatisfaction. There has been a great deal of folly going on in this house without my knowledge. I don’t blame you for it. Your mother ought to have known better, but she did not. This nonsense took a tone which it never ought to have assumed without my sanction. Under my own roof I ought to have been the first acquainted with it.’

‘I thought so from the first,’ said Geraldine, abruptly.

Mr. Faulkner looked at her with surprise and satisfaction: ‘I am glad to hear it, Geraldine.’ He knew not her real meaning; knew not that she had wished to announce to him from the first the absolute independence of action which she claimed. He went on: ‘It was placed before me to-day by Madame Baldovini herself, and I at once gave her proposal the only answer it can ever receive from me, and one to which I trust your good sense will lead you to submit; believe me, Geraldine, any exertion of self-control this may call for

on your part at this present moment, will be fully appreciated by me, and hereafter will be rejoiced in by you.' He had softened his tone to as much kindness as he could infuse into it on a day of so much irritation to him.

'What was your answer, papa?' asked Geraldine, turning pale.

'That it was quite inconsistent with my concern for your lasting happiness to give my consent to such a marriage.'

Geraldine did not wait for Mr. Faulkner to finish the speech she had challenged, but exclaimed, with vehemence, gazing wildly in his face:

'And do you really think that these few cold words are to crush all hope of happiness, all life and love out of our hearts? And Ippolito, did he acquiesce?'

'He behaved like a madman,' was the reply in Mr. Faulkner's mind, but far from his lips. 'Of course,' he said, briefly, 'he must take my decision.'

'If he do, if he do,' returned Geraldine, clasping her hands, 'you will have to answer for killing her whom you choose to call your child! Remember, I am not your child. You might have a better right to destroy me thus, if I were.'

'Geraldine,' said Mr. Faulkner, rising slowly, 'let me hear none of this extravagance. I will not permit it. Your mother made you my ward; I have considered you my daughter. I require your dutiful submission, and I have reason to expect your fullest confidence that your welfare will be safe in my hands. Go, Geraldine, I forgive your impetuosity, because you are but a child.'

'I am no child,' replied Geraldine, rising and standing before him in stately height. 'I am a woman. I was a woman from the moment that he told me that he loved me. I was a vain, trifling child till then. I cried for trifles, and they were never refused me. I ask now for what the whole happiness of my future life depends on, and I will not be denied.'

Mr. Faulkner was astonished, not so much by her

violence as by the haughty decision of her tone, and he was far more hurt than he ever told by her rejection of his paternal care, by her utter absence of filial affection. Geraldine little knew how long the wound she thus recklessly inflicted would rankle. Perhaps had she seen now how it inly bled, she might have been moved to compunction. As it was, there was no betrayal of feeling in the dry tone in which Mr. Faulkner at length replied :

‘Geraldine, I have for some time suspected this spirit of insubordination in you. It must be conquered. Quit my presence. You have held language unfit to be addressed to me. Go to your chamber, and reflect on it. Do not descend again to-night, and do not expect me to recur to this subject.’

‘I shall go to mamma,’ replied Geraldine, too much agitated to consider how much ground she would lose by petty altercations at such a moment.

‘Do as I have commanded you,’ was Mr. Faulkner’s reply, in a tone of thunder, which had never met Geraldine’s ear before, and aghast she fled.

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